

FOCUS:
Advocacy in the
humanitarian field

From the VOICE Secretariat

Humanitarian NGOs have not traditionally engaged in advocacy nor taken a strong position on politically controversial issues. Carrying out advocacy was feared to compromise commitment to the humanitarian principles, above all independence and impartiality, which are considered the key to the acceptance by the affected populations. Increasingly, the changing environment for humanitarian action and new actors have required NGOs to relate to issues that are having an impact on the delivery of aid. Also, humanitarian advocacy has started taking shape in relation to operational reality on the ground.

Many VOICE member organisations have established positions on and advocate for themes that are directly linked to their operations. Articles on reproductive health and disaster risk reduction are examples of these. This newsletter highlights also some of the wider issues; new actors such as private security companies, and the issue of protection. The different articles present reasons for advocacy in the humanitarian field. They show the variety of audiences and levels of dialogue that NGOs use to promote their messages. The concerns and consequences of advocacy at the operational reality are also discussed.

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

VOICE

VOICE stands for Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies. It is a network representing some 90 European non-governmental organisations (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 European Union on emergency aid, relief, rehabilitation and disaster preparedness. As a European network, it represents and promotes the values and specificities of humanitarian NGOs, in collaboration with other humanitarian actors. Based in Brussels, VOICE has been active since 1993 and is an independent organisation under Belgian law since 2001.

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GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN REFORMS

EDITORIAL



When talking about global humanitarian reform, it is important not to limit the debate only to the UN reform process. We need to take a wider perspective including also the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative, the ongoing policy developments within the EU through the establishment of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid and the exchange at the Global Humanitarian Platform (GHP).

While the NGO community is actively engaged in the UN reforms, it is also making considerable efforts to professionalize and to strengthen its capacity in areas such as accountability, surge capacity, and needs assessments. All these initiatives aim to face the new challenges and changing environment of humanitarian action. However, given the scale of the whole process, it is important that humanitarian NGOs and other actors in the humanitarian sector keep in mind that these reforms - foremost - aim at improving the effectiveness of the humanitarian response. Particularly for humanitarian NGOs, the reform process needs further to assure and safeguard their independence and ensure continued proximity to the vulnerable populations.

As far as the UN humanitarian reform is concerned, NGOs have remarked that the financing system through the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) needs further improvements. Rather than having direct access to the funding, NGOs can only make use of it when being subcontracted by UN agencies. This clearly could reduce the degree of NGOs' independence. In the CERF Partnership Task Force, NGOs therefore continue to call for direct access for NGOs to these funds, as well as for greater speed of administrative processes and transparency of this financing system.

As for the Cluster Approach, NGOs recognize its potential and are increasingly engaged especially at field level. One of the challenges of the cluster approach is to ensure more inclusiveness of all actors, especially of local NGOs.

Efficient coordination in the field is crucial in order to ensure quality assistance to affected populations. NGOs have to take responsibility in this regard, but efficient coordination also needs good leadership. So far it is the improved process of recruitment, training and retention of the UN Humanitarian Coordinators where progress has been very slow.

Security of aid workers remains a main pre-condition to have access to victims, and therefore to the effectiveness of humanitarian action. The integrated mission approach, whereby the humanitarian, development and political/military wings of the UN come under one umbrella, largely ignores the importance of the recognition of the humanitarian actors as neutral and impartial by local populations. The blurring of lines between civilian neutral humanitarian action and military activities now taking place in several crises areas, has an impact on the security of aid workers: their action in the field is no longer perceived as independent and neutral from political considerations. This might result in eventual limitations to, or indeed, an end to access to vulnerable populations.

In its contribution to the reform process, the European Union has taken a clear stand on the need for respect of humanitarian principles in the draft European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. VOICE welcomes this position of the EU to support impartiality, neutrality, and independence as bases for European humanitarian action and that EU humanitarian aid is not a crises management tool. However, it remains to be seen how the specificity of humanitarian action will be preserved in countries where the EU will employ its full range of civilian and military crises management tools.

In order to strengthen collaboration, NGOs, the Red Cross movement and UN agencies have initiated a dialogue on an equal footing in the Global Humanitarian Platform. This Platform has committed to the so-called Principles of Partnership, whose implementation could become essential for the success of the global humanitarian reform.

Since the whole reform process of the global humanitarian architecture is going to shape the environment and the framework for NGOs' operational reality on the ground, NGOs need to continue being critical. At the same time they need to be actively and constructively engaged in the relevant fora where the reforms are being taken forward, in order to develop coherent and common messages which contribute to the construction of the future of humanitarian aid.

Paul Grossrieder
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ADVOCACY TO ENSURE REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH FROM CRISIS TO DEVELOPMENT

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'(...) reproductive health needs of those affected by conflict and natural disaster (...)'

★ **People displaced by conflict and natural disasters have a right to health, including sexual and reproductive health (SRH), equal to that of all people, yet their capacity to realize these rights is severely compromised. These groups face high maternal mortality, unmet need for family planning, complications following unsafe abortion, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV and gender-based violence. Working together on an integrated programme of advocacy, development of technical materials, training and service delivery, relief and development agencies and UN bodies have made progress in the last 15 years since attention was first paid to this topic. Relief and development agencies can bring about change through advocacy but it must be targeted and carefully managed.**

★ BACKGROUND

Focused attention to the reproductive health needs of those affected by conflict and natural disaster can be dated to the mid-1990s when a series of advocacy and awareness raising initiatives took place. A 1993 Lancet editorial denounced the absence of services for these populations. In 1994 the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children published the seminal report *Refugee Women and Reproductive Health Care: Reassessing Priorities* highlighting the lack of SRH services available to displaced women. In the same year, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) identified reproductive health as a basic human right, in itself a result of intense advocacy by a range of organisations.

★ ROLE OF ADVOCACY

For refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) to have access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, change is required in policy, funding and operational standards at national and international levels. Examples below show how agencies have achieved this.

★ ADVOCACY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLICY AND STANDARDS

By coming together in networks, agencies have been able to increase their voice in advocating for increased attention to SRH in emergencies whilst also developing technical resources and field support. The Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crises (IAWG), a group of 40 UN, governmental and non-governmental organizations with both humanitarian and development expertise and the Reproductive Health Response in Conflict Consortium (RHRC) are examples of such collaborations.

In 1999, the IAWG produced the first ever field manual on SRH for refugees to facilitate the provision of services. The success of the manual, *Reproductive Health in Refugee Situations: An Inter-Agency Field Manual*, was the result of collaboration and intensive advocacy by relief and development actors to ensure final approval, and remains today a key tool to guide policy and practice.

The *Inter-Agency Field Manual* introduced the Minimum Initial Service Package (MISP), a set of priority activities to ensure SRH services in the first days and weeks of an emergency. Through sustained advocacy the MISP was included as a standard in the 2004 revision of the Sphere Minimum Standards (www.sphereproject.org) along with a set of SRH indicators.

A more recent initiative brings together major UN and NGO agencies from the fields of relief and development to ensure that good quality comprehensive SRH services are routinely provided to those in emergency situations. By combining advocacy with field services, clinical training and research, the Reproductive Health Access, Information and Services in Emergencies Initiative (RAISE), a joint programme of the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health and Marie Stopes International, uses evidence from the field to strengthen the policy and funding environment for the provision of comprehensive SRH services in refugee and IDP situations. Unlike many relief programmes, RAISE is a long-term venture. The longer timeframe makes it more feasible for linkages between relief and development partners to be developed and strengthened and for agencies to become involved in advocacy initiatives.

★ ADVOCACY IN COUNTRIES AFFECTED BY CRISIS

In Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), NGOs are at the start of a process of influencing national policy to include all essential SRH drugs in their list of drugs; to ensure that essential drugs and equipment are present in the field and to create a national platform for SRH rights. NGOs are working together to identify their target groups and opportunities for action. Some of the NGOs involved have been working in DRC over a period of time. The more long-term nature of their projects means that these agencies have a good knowledge of the system in which they are working.

In Sudan, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and NGOs are working together to explore avenues of collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MoH) to develop activities to improve reproductive health in Darfur. A key focus is

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'(...) agencies have been able to move forward in a collaborative way identifying specific issues for change and making positive recommendations (...)'

on the MoH's current review of the terms of reference of different cadres of health staff as well as on a lack of family planning provision in tertiary hospitals. UNFPA and the NGOs will provide support to help ensure access to services through the development of practical guidelines and training of providers.

In Afghanistan, Marie Stopes International has been able to advocate for reproductive health rights in this post-conflict setting in part because of its independent funding outside of the Basic Package of Health Services (see below). This has been alongside training for health professionals from public, private and NGO facilities in the delivery of quality, rights-based reproductive health services.



BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES/ RESULTS OF ADVOCACY

Sustained advocacy by a range of national and international actors including service delivery, advocacy and academic organisations has ensured positive developments in policy, technical guidance and standards for field operations. In turn this has resulted in humanitarian agencies beginning to shift policies and field procedures to deliver reproductive health services to people in crisis settings.

In terms of advocacy at the field level, despite a lack of strong analysis and evaluation, there seems to have been success when agencies have been able to move forward in a collaborative way identifying specific issues for change and making positive recommendations with good knowledge of the system in which they are working to facilitate that change.



CONTINUED ADVOCACY REQUIRED AS THE FIELD DEVELOPS

Changes in the humanitarian environment have contributed to the advances, as well as the challenges, of providing reproductive health services in crisis settings.

The Cluster Approach and the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) are developments which are causing concern for the provision of SRH services. Whilst both initiatives do not exclude SRH there is concern that it will not receive the attention it deserves unless agencies work together to advocate with a range of stakeholders at national and international levels to ensure the provision of services.

Whilst some aspects of reproductive health are being provided especially in stable refugee camp settings, ongoing advocacy is essential to ensure

that these services are comprehensive and include emergency obstetric care, all methods of family planning, STI/HIV/AIDS services and response to gender-based violence as well as extending services to IDPs and those not in camp settings.

Whilst the discourse continues on the relationship between humanitarian advocacy and neutrality, particular issues surround advocacy on the issue of sexual and reproductive health, a particularly controversial topic. For example, when Médecins Sans Frontières Holland reported on sexual violence in Darfur the head of mission was charged with crimes against the Sudanese state (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4593443.stm>).

A recent HPG Policy Brief 28: Humanitarian advocacy in Darfur (www.odi.org.uk/hpg/papers/hpgbrief28.pdf) discusses the changing nature of humanitarian advocacy and highlights some of the actions undertaken by actors in that particular setting to meet the challenges. One of the strategies cited in the paper is to use collective approaches and indeed where reproductive health is concerned these linkages have been shown to yield positive results. Linkages with SRH agencies can be useful as humanitarian agencies move into this area of advocacy.



CONCLUSION

There is an urgent need for the mainstreaming of SRH within relief organisations, both at headquarters and in field operations. There is an equally urgent need for SRH organisations to recognise the SRH needs of those affected by conflict and natural disaster, and mainstream this response into their institutional and field operations.

Global advocacy efforts are a critical corollary to the provision of services as they focus on the policy and funding changes needed to ensure displaced communities receive SRH services through relief and development assistance.

For refugees and internally displaced women and men to truly be accorded their right to health, governments, donors, academic institutions, relief and development agencies, including the UN and NGOs, must increase their commitment at grassroots, national and international levels to making reproductive rights a reality.

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SHARING, LEARNING AND INNOVATING: ADVOCACY BASED ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION PRACTICE

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The number of disasters is increasing worldwide and is expected to continue to do so as a result of climate change.

When a disaster strikes, Cordaid provides relief aid. However, preparedness and prevention of disasters are considered equally important as relief, if not more. Hazards cannot always be prevented but damage can be reduced if people are less vulnerable and have the capacity to cope with it.

'Communities are assisted in carrying out their own hazard and vulnerability analysis (...)'

Cordaid's advocacy on disaster risk reduction (DRR) focuses to use practical examples. The aim is to show how people live and cope with drought, what impact climate change has on their livelihood, what they can do to adapt to the changes in their environment and how they can be assisted in a better way. In other words, how it is possible to link relief, rehabilitation and development through a DRR approach. This is a long term and participatory approach, not a one-off event. And this may be a major change for many humanitarian agencies. In addition, the institutional funding mechanisms need to be adapted accordingly in order to enable funding for longer-term approach on DRR. The target groups of DRR advocacy are therefore manifold: donors, local governments, other (I)NGOs, the United Nations and the public at large.

Sustainable prevention and mitigation can only be achieved in close cooperation with all relevant stakeholders. Specific attention is to be given to sharing lessons learned and advocacy on DRR. As a method, Cordaid made the choice to work actively on Community Managed Disaster Risk Reduction (CMDRR) in 11 countries¹. Using this concept (by now around) 90 NGOs have been trained in CMDRR, a training manual was developed and they are receiving support in order to implement programmes that contribute to the prevention, mitigation, community survivability and preparedness for different types of hazards. Communities are assisted in carrying out their own hazard and vulnerability analysis and to determine what needs to be done to improve their coping mechanisms. Cordaid partner agencies are involved, while close cooperation with local government and other agencies is sought.

The best example on advocacy based on practical examples so far is the Drought Cycle Management (DCM) programme, which started 4 years ago in the Greater Horn of Africa. In this region droughts used to occur once in 10 years in the past but once every 2 years or even

more is normal during recent years. In 2003 a DCM toolkit was developed jointly with NGOs, governments, UN and experts from 5 countries in the region. This toolkit contains best practices of dealing with drought. Since 2004 the toolkit is practically implemented by 10 NGOs in 8 districts of Kenya. In the meantime the programme has been extended to Ethiopia and Uganda. The lessons learnt from the Kenya programme were captured this year on a DVD² and in a publication.³ The toolkit, the DVD and the publication are all used for advocacy purposes: they were launched officially during a ceremony to which government officials and donors were invited. They are used as information material during national, regional and international workshops. Also, articles were published in local newspapers (in Kenya and Ethiopia), magazines (in the Netherlands) and publications on best practices (by UN ISDR⁴). Presentations on this toolkit are given during major conferences.

This type of advocacy, using practical examples, sharing our lessons learned, has led to a lot of attention from all stakeholder groups. Many are interested in close cooperation and contributing. Government officials (e.g. in the Netherlands), other NGOs, and UN invite Cordaid and partners for workshops to present the DCM approach. EC, ECHO and other NGOs contribute financially to the programmes. Also, ECHO started a pilot disaster preparedness programme in 2006 of which Cordaid is one of the implementing agencies. For the overall advocacy and in view of the enormous impact of climate change, Cordaid will continue to promote sharing lessons learned in disaster risk reduction as a practical approach to adapt to climate change. It is crucial to keep on learning and innovating jointly with all stakeholders.

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1. Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Malawi, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala
2. *Signs of Hope: a community managed climate adaptation initiative, Cordaid 2007*
3. *Building resilience to climate change: experiences of Kenyan pastoralist communities in managing drought, Cordaid 2007*
4. *United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (www.unisdr.org)*

PROTECTION IS EVERYONE'S RESPONSIBILITY: LINKING ADVOCACY AND FIELD REALITY

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(...) combining multi-level advocacy and humanitarian aid delivery as part of an integrated approach to humanitarian protection (...)

★ WHY PROTECTION?

"Child rights is not a marginal issue on the ground in countries like Somalia. It is often easy to dismiss child rights as a sentimental issue but the reality is that without continued work towards protecting the rights of children, we will continue to lose future generations to disease, disasters and conflict" Chris Smoot, World Vision Somalia's Programme Director speaking on the 18th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, joins a growing crowd of humanitarian workers voicing their support to move from a minimalist approach to humanitarianism to an integrated approach to humanitarian protection.

Agencies are increasingly combining multi-level advocacy and humanitarian aid delivery as part of an integrated approach to humanitarian protection, which sees all activities from front line field workers to colleagues in international capitals as part of the protection effort.

World Vision has taken the ICRC consensus as the basis to develop its approach to humanitarian protection meaning "all activities, aimed at obtaining full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law (i.e. human rights, humanitarian and refugee law). Human rights and humanitarian actors shall conduct these activities impartially and not on the basis of race, national, or ethnic origin, language or gender". It focuses on child protection, given the existence of specific rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, which must be fulfilled in order to ensure an integrated approach, truly inclusive of the most vulnerable in a civilian population.

We recognize that protection can encompass four simultaneous approaches to **prevent** violations in international law, **address** violations through redress, ensure **restoration** of rights and dignity, and **foster** a protective environment. The imperatives of immediate protection usually require agencies to focus on the physical safety, preservation of dignity, and integrity of a civilian population. This is the "protection edge" of humanitarian action (risk = threat + vulnerability × time). During conflict, humanitarian needs are often the direct result of violations in rights under international law, as the on-going crises in Somalia and Sudan show. Careful assessments increasingly indicate deliberate targeting of the local population, and a disturbing intentional pattern in violations.

★ HUMANITARIAN AGENCIES' ROLE IN PROTECTION

Protection approaches therefore need to address both the consequences and the causal issues of humanitarian response. All programme design must aim to promote, and as possible, provide, a protective environment, through integrating these two elements.

As most crises stem from violation in international law, including international humanitarian law, human rights, and refugee law, humanitarian agencies must combine service delivery in humanitarian assistance with reporting on violations witnessed, as key duty-bearers in humanitarian contexts. Where the State is unable or reluctant to fulfill its obligations under international law, it is especially incumbent on the humanitarian agency to work with relevant community structures to protect civilian stakeholders, identifying the most vulnerable. This makes contextual analysis, including conflict analysis, an upstream necessity when programming. World Vision uses tools such as MSTC, "Making Sense of Turbulent Contexts", and Local Capacities for Peace/Do No Harm for macro and micro analysis respectively. This allows us to consider our contribution to the fulfilment of protection needs, analysing the primary and secondary consequences and risks for the population, whilst gaining a realistic perspective on the limitations of our role. The humanitarian agency will never be in a position to ensure the protection of the population with which it works, due to limitations in controlling the complex interplay of legislative, political, military, social, cultural and economic variables and structures. Nor should it be. However, our access to vulnerable communities allows, often the only, conduit and opportunity, to these communities to pursue their basic rights under international law, and agencies should support this. Conversely, inadequate analysis of the context, and neglect in addressing causal factors in vulnerability can detract from the fulfilment of international law, and could mean that the humanitarian agency in effect becomes an actor in the denial of the rights of that population.

★ PROVIDING A PROTECTIVE ENVIRONMENT

An integrated approach to programming would thus encompass:

1. effective programming of protection in all responses, ensuring the appropriate participation of local communities, including

children, and any vulnerable group, in a) analysing the status of the respect of international humanitarian law, human rights norms and refugee law, and identifying the duty-bearers i.e. those responsible for ensuring protection b) setting objectives to address gaps in protection in line with realistic outcomes (e.g. changing the behaviour of perpetrators, changing the actions of responsible authorities, and reducing the vulnerability of affected communities), c) agreeing on adequate monitoring mechanisms and mechanisms to ensure accountability to main stakeholders;

2. responding to violations of rights through redress and an enabling environment for that redress, by promoting the enforcement of adequate legislation and government capacity and structures, and addressing harmful attitudes, customs and practices;
3. building the capacity of children, their families and communities to understand and exercise their rights, including the identification and articulation of violations in their rights, or gaps in the provision of their rights (including, for example, through wilful neglect, misinformation or lack of access to adequate infrastructure or services).

HOW WE DO THIS

World Vision's protection approach has therefore also needed to be reviewed in order to address the critical nexus of programming operational responses on the ground which are a key entry point for protection, and which provide local analysis, and advocacy responses on the national, regional and international levels. This has tested organisational dynamics and the boundaries of interpretation in the humanitarian mandate.

We have developed rapid emergency advocacy response mechanisms for restrictive contexts. We have piloted several integrated emergency responses, using both advocacy programming experience and skills combined with practical humanitarian aid programming. This entails assessing and weighing the impact on children's lives and the rest of the community; our capacity to influence change; the cost of inaction; impact on staff safety and security; impact on asset safety and security; impact on access to the community; impact on key relationships; national and international media coverage; possible funding streams and impact on other entities in our international partnership.

IS IT WORTH IT?

Peacekeepers for Eastern DRC

People in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have long suffered from instability, violence and human rights abuse - in recent years due to pillaging of natural resources by competing factions. Despite its enormous suffering, this part of DRC rarely receives the international community's attention.

Between April and June 2003, intensified fighting between the Hema and Lendu ethnic groups caused the humanitarian situation in the DRC's Ituri province to deteriorate dramatically. Throughout this crisis, World Vision's Program Director for Eastern DRC, Jonas Njelango, kept our UN office informed with timely situation reports to inform senior UN staff and ambassadors of the gravity of the situation, and what needed to be done. Other NGOs took similar steps.

On 30 May, the Security Council passed Resolution 1484 for an Interim Emergency Multi-National Force (IEMF) to address the immediate crisis in Ituri. Many believe that the unanimous adoption of the Resolution was at least partly due to lobbying by humanitarian agencies.

Seeing this as an opportunity to raise World Vision's concerns about the long-term humanitarian challenges in DRC, our UN Office drafted a letter to all Security Council Ambassadors urging them to take steps to protect civilians throughout Eastern DRC from the wider conflict, and to stop the exploitation of DRC's natural resources. After direct consultation with World Vision's Program Director in Eastern DRC, the East Africa Regional Office, the Africa Regional Advocacy Adviser and the WVI President, the letter was co-signed by the international directors of Save the Children Fund and CARE. Oxfam, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch sent a similar letter.

On 28 July 2003, we were greatly encouraged to hear that the Security Council had passed Resolution 1493, to complement 1484, with strong language on all the issues raised in the NGO letters.

Pakistan: Response to 2005 Earthquake

On the 8th October 2005 at 8.50am an earthquake measuring 7.6 on the Richter Scale struck Pakistan and India on the Northern Kashmiri border. 30,000 sq. km were affected.

'(...) humanitarian agency to work with relevant community structures to protect civilian stakeholders, identifying the most vulnerable.'

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'Protection issues can too often be seen as a one-off issue (...)'

World Vision's response focused on the North West Frontier province and targeted populations in the mountainous areas and those displaced to temporary camps in the Siran and Balakot valleys.

A key part of the response was protection programming, principally for children and also for women, affected by the earthquake. It was clear early on that the strong cultural protection mechanisms of extended family ensured that few children were left separated from their families. However, field staff conducting assessments and participation activities in the community became aware of the potential for children and even female-headed households to be encouraged into institutional 'orphanages'. Co-operating through the linkages formed at cluster level and close co-operation with other child and protection focused agencies World Vision was able to produce a simple but effective paper on the problems and dangers of institutionalization. With strong follow up at the national level by all agencies, and effective support and pressure from the international capitals, especially the UN system, the Pakistani government took a range of decisions to discourage or restrict the number of orphanages being established. The North West Frontier regional government also took an active responsibility to monitor the established institutions and assess the standards being used.

For protection advocacy to be effective it is important for agencies to use their collective weight and their global linkages to promote international standards and norms. It is also important to note in this particular example that regular field monitoring and analysis of the situation is essential. Protection issues can too often be seen as a one-off issue; once the initial 'threat' is resolved (in this case, children losing their right to stay with their families), then agencies 'take their eye off the ball'. In reality, situations are fluid, especially with rapid displacement of people, and all actors have an obligation to constantly re-assess their analysis of the situation. For advocates based further away from the field it is these nuanced assessments that enable them to promote effective messages that have a targeted effect on the situation.

NEXT STEPS

World Vision recognises the need to step up its integrated approach to protection. Programming of humanitarian aid, as a key entry point, is being adapted and the new advocacy mechanisms are being integrated as part of a more rapid overall

response. We are strengthening monitoring and reporting in line with UN SC Resolution 1612 on monitoring and reporting on violations in children's rights. Measuring outcomes on the ground remains a challenge.

However, to be effective requires the timely and coordinated efforts of international and regional humanitarian agencies and like-minded governmental institutions. The UN Security Council needs to ensure that protection is a guiding concern to its decisions, rather than an adjunct to politico-military interests. UN SC Resolution 1612 is not a luxury.

In Europe, we must continue to work within the Child Protection in Crisis Group to promote the implementation of the EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict by ECHO, as well as the European Council's geographical working groups. VOICE's strengthened advocacy role, and protection within that, can be enhanced through the dynamic and concerted response of its members to violations in international law. This would be in line with the upcoming European Consensus in Humanitarian Aid, which actively and strongly promotes international law.

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PRIVATE SECURITY COMPANIES: NEED FOR ADVOCACY

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 **The changing environment, such as the increasing number of complex emergencies, brings new actors and new challenges to relief work. There is a need for NGOs working in these contexts to relate to the occurring changes. It becomes particularly important when new actors are threatening the humanitarian space and the security of civilian actors. One such example are private security companies (PSCs), which have been increasingly appearing in the same context where humanitarian aid workers are bringing relief to crisis affected people.**

(...) private security companies tend to have a negative effect on the perception of humanitarian action by the population.'

On the subject of private security companies Swisspeace, a peace research institute, has issued a study on Private Security Companies and local populations¹. On Afghanistan, the study concludes that "PSCs are seen in a negative light,... difficult to distinguish between different security actors,... creating a sense of vulnerability for the population,... security is becoming a commodity of the rich,... PSCs have a negative impact on the security in the neighbourhoods they work in,... high cost of private security is diverting needed reconstruction funds,... unregulated state of PSCs a major problem". In short, private security companies tend to have a negative effect on the perception of humanitarian action by the population. Despite this some of the institutional donors for humanitarian aid, and even some of the humanitarian NGOs do rely on PSCs for the humanitarian work. This might have dramatic consequences, since "for many Afghans, NGO is a generic reference to the international community, as most of the experience of Afghans in the past were with this type of organizations only"². For humanitarian NGOs, being identified with instances that have a negative effect on the perception of the local population of international actors, does not exactly help in giving the impression of NGO solidarity with the beneficiaries.

Through the media, examples of criminal behaviour of PSCs have come to international attention in Iraq and Afghanistan. At least two of the latest investigations reveal that the contracts of the companies in question were paid for by a Western government humanitarian aid body. On September 22nd 2007, 17 people were killed by Blackwater private military company guards accompanying a USAID convoy in Iraq (BBC and Reuters Alertnet, reported it as an US embassy convoy). For sure, the Iraqis and many other people will never forget the images

of the charred bodies of a mother and her child fused together when the car they were driving in took fire. On October 9th 2007 another PSC (Australian Dubai based Unity Ressources Group) protecting a convoy of Research Triangle Institute (USAID funded non-profit research organization) killed a mother, a widow trying to make ends meet by running a taxi service, her female passenger, and wounded a third woman in the backseat with her child next to her.

The above highlights the United States Government making use of PSCs, but the US is seemingly not an exception amongst humanitarian aid donors. The British Association of Private Security Companies (BAPSC) - their US counterpart being called International Peace Operations Association (IPOA) - states for their annual conference that "PSCs have become a necessary actor and accepted partner in many of the unstable environments of this rapidly changing world. Equally, it has emerged that the British Government is considering ways in which the private security industry could provide 'support' for frontline troops in 'war zones' such as Afghanistan". If the British Government is on board, would other EU governments be next to consider the use of PSCs in crisis affected environments? In this respect, it is also to be noted that the security business has no problem to jump from providing security, to military "support" action. Experience has shown that blurring of lines between military / military related and humanitarian civilian activities has an impact on the security of aid workers.

Supranational bodies like the United Nations and the African Union, have a long history with these private military companies (PMC), more specifically through their respective peace keeping departments. Some contributing countries channel their support to the peacekeeping activities by paying PMC contracts for logistics, transport and training of "new" armies (Blackwater in South Sudan, Dyncorp in Liberia for example). While the PMC Executive Outcomes was involved in Sierra Leone back in 1996, Pacific Architects and Engineers (PAE) was contracted by the US Government/African Union to offer logistic services to ECOMOG³ and also to some NGOs.

Over the years the outsourcing to PMCs of logistical assistance to peace troops, has become a systematic and growing business. In 2004 in Darfur, PAE together with Dyncorp got a contract of 20,6 million USD for providing support to the African Union force. On October 24th 2007, the United Nations awarded PAE

1. Lisa Rimli and Susanne Schmeidl: *Private Security Companies and Local Populations. An exploratory study of Afghanistan and Angola.* November 2007.

2. *Idem.* P.22, footnote 76 interview of a representative of Afghanistan NGO Security Office (ANSO).

3. Economic Community of West African States Cease-fire Monitoring Group.

THE ISSUE - ADVOCACY IN THE HUMANITARIAN FIELD

a 250 million USD no-bid contract to provide infrastructure for the UN peacekeeping mission presently unfolding in Sudan (Darfur), Somalia and Chad/Central African Republic.

The Swisspeace report on PSCs is illustrating how financially important the security business is in Afghanistan alone: *"According to official sources of the UK government, it spent £15,269,000 (USD 30,028,368) during April 2004 and August 2006 for private security services. Compared to what the US government spends in this sector the UK figures may be relatively small. For example, the contract for USPI was estimated at USD 36 million for 4½ years and the contracts for DynCorp were estimated at a minimum of USD 150 million for poppy eradication and police training. UNOPS has awarded security contracts to the private sector in the range of 24 million since 2005... These figures reflect only a fraction of spending for PSCs, as big firms such as Blackwater or Saladin are not included."*⁴

Booming business indeed, and the presented is only a fraction of their overall activities. A report⁵ presented to the UN General Assembly may shed some light on the scope, and possible human rights' violations of PMCs. The report concludes that *"[having] analysed the activities at the international level... of private companies that recruit, train, use or finance former military personnel and ex-policemen from all regions of the world to operate in zones of armed conflict, the Working Group is of the opinion that many such manifestations are new modalities of mercenary-related activities."*⁶ In addition, the report states that *"...outsourcing and privatizing various military functions by a number of Member States in the past 10 years has resulted in the mushrooming of private military and security companies... connected with the conflict situations in Afghanistan and Iraq..... the existence of provisions in national legislation granting immunity to private military... can easily become de facto impunity..."*⁷

So far, there has not been a lot of reactions from NGOs to this UN report. How should NGOs react to this situation, which clearly is closely linked to their operational reality? How far should they go in their advocacy and demands for regulation and policy change? NGOs could claim that all PSCs sign the Code of Conduct of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent like the PSC Armor Group has done for instance, or ask all PSCs to participate in ICRC training on International Humanitarian Law. But this

is most unlikely to succeed in changing the present reality since these means do not have the regulatory power. PSC remains big business, armed business, and there is but a thin line between private security, private military and mercenaries.

This issue should be of great concern to humanitarian NGOs, since growing numbers of protracted man-made crises have led to a number of scenarios where military/security forces and humanitarian actors intervene alongside each other. For NGOs to be able to provide assistance and relief to victims of conflict in the closest possible and secure way, they will seek acceptance by the populations and different opposing parties. How humanitarian actors are perceived in one specific context may rapidly influence the perception - and thus their security environment - elsewhere.⁸

The first step to take, for humanitarian NGOs is to clarify within our own organizations to what extent we are already involved with PSCs in our humanitarian work in order to ensure safety and security of our personnel. Then we should seek a frank discussion and an open dialogue within the NGO community. The outcome of this dialogue should be brought to the attention of the UN possibly through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC).

Anyhow, the most important effort NGOs need to make is to convince our national governments that humanitarian work needs to be disconnected from military interventions. There is no such thing as a humanitarian military intervention. Mandated regular government soldiers have to respect the Geneva Conventions, and failing to do so leads to them being court-martialed. There is a need for strong regulation of Private Security Companies, since it looks like they can shoot their way through a traffic jam, and seem to be unaccountable to whatever justice.

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'(...) there is but a thin line between private security, private military and mercenaries.'

4. *Idem.* P. 41.

5. *Use of mercenaries as a means of violating human rights and impeding the exercise of the right of peoples self-determination. Report by the UN Working Group. A/62/301 of 24 August 2007.*

6. *Idem.* Art. 68.

7. *Idem.* Art. 69.

8. *Joint Council Secretariat - Commission Services Working Paper on Security and Development - Food for thought to strengthen EU policy coherence. 2 October 2007.*

A SMALL KINDNESS: FROM ISLAMIC RELIEF TO ADVOCATING FOR POVERTY REDUCTION

THE ISSUE - ADVOCACY IN THE HUMANITARIAN FIELD

 In the last two decades more and more international agencies have come to realize that development and emergency interventions alone are unlikely to produce sustained improvement in the lives of poor and vulnerable people. Addressing the outcome of the cause alone is a not sustainable, ineffective and perhaps even hypocritical given the fact that current trade regimes and the international financial system are far from being fair. Advocacy hence is a valuable and essential tool that draws on programme experience to show the impact existing policies in “the North” and “the South” has on the poor. For Islamic NGOs this principle is further underlined by the core teachings of the faith, which emphasise that one is not just to give support to the needy but is also to “urge the feeding of the poor”¹, espousing somewhat a rights-based approach to development.

‘(...) Advocacy hence is a valuable and essential tool that draws on programme experience to show the impact existing policies in the North and the South has on the poor.’

Advocacy at Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) is aimed at promoting the delivery of humanitarian aid and development programmes referring specifically to the social and political issues which affect its effective delivery. IRW advocacy strategy is based on Islamic teachings and utilises its unique identity and position of a Western Muslim organization. Through this added value and leverage change from within can be generated particularly in the Muslim world.

However, since the ‘war on terror’ has gained momentum, Western NGOs and development government agencies have been reticent in their contacts with both Muslim faith-based NGOs in the West and those in Muslim-majority countries. This widespread curbing of Muslim humanitarian action, however, threatens the ability of the Muslim community to work towards instituting a stronger sense of social justice and civil society in areas which are plagued by conflict or poverty. Many have been severely restricted in their work and blanket crackdowns, particularly in the Middle East and the United States, have led to the closing down of some NGOs without public investigation, proper evidence presented in a court of law or the right to appeal.

Hence IRW, unaffected by the onslaught, set out in 2004 to facilitate a programme for the better integration of humanitarian relief and development organizations based in Muslim majority countries into the international humanitarian community. This culminated in an initiative now called the Humanitarian Forum that actively works to advocate for the resolution of this problem. Through discussions with a broad range of stakeholders in the field of relief and development, the Forum aimed to explore possible ways of integrating NGOs in the south into the

international field of humanitarian relief and development cooperation. Reaching consensus did not take much time, wide consultations held with over 1200 NGOs in 14 countries through conferences and workshops, indicated that integration would require capacity building, forming partnerships, coordination and the promotion of a well-regulated legal environment in these countries.

Now the Humanitarian Forum has significantly evolved and it is now an inclusive coming together of humanitarian organizations, an eclectic mix of international non-governmental and governmental agencies and the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, helping bridge the perceived gap between the West and the Muslim world. The Forum supports NGOs in the Muslim world with assistance in joint capacity building, advocacy for a legal framework for greater transparency, promotion of humanitarian principles and standards and improving communication and co-operation between the international humanitarian community. As a first step, the Forum has set up Executive Committees in partnership with governments and civil society in Yemen, Sudan, Indonesia, Pakistan and Kuwait. Through this the Humanitarian Forum seeks to foster partnerships and closer co-operation among humanitarian and charitable organizations from ‘the South’, charitable organizations from ‘the North’ and the multi-lateral system.

The goal of the Humanitarian Forum is to help create a conducive, unbiased and safe environment for the implementation of technically sound and principled humanitarian action by

- providing a platform for dialogue,
- promoting mutual understanding,
- supporting capacity building and development of NGOs and charities,
- advocating for a legal framework for greater transparency and accountability,
- promoting humanitarian principles and standards and
- improving communication and co-operation

The Humanitarian Forum is committed to giving each member organization a chance; to discuss issues of concern to the humanitarian relief and development sector, to contribute to achievement of Millennium Development Goals, to form partnerships, to support better coordinated and more efficient delivery of humanitarian aid and development assistance.

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1. The Qur’an, A Small Kindness, 69:34.

NGO ADVOCACY ON CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

THE ISSUE - ADVOCACY IN THE HUMANITARIAN FIELD

 **Humanitarian NGOs are confronted by manifold challenges in their relations with different military actors, including international peace operations, state militaries and non-state armed groups. As such, 'civil-military relations' (CIVMIL) constitutes a critical issue of relevance to NGOs at both the policy/advocacy and the operational levels.**

Despite its importance, NGOs have generally not focused their advocacy efforts on civil-military relations issues in recent years. Obviously, engagement varies from NGO to NGO, and from country to country. Capacity is generally weak. NGOs have largely not invested in staff to engage in policy dialogue or to participate in trainings and exercises with the military. Thus advocacy is largely ad-hoc and reactive around military operations in specific contexts, rather than engaging in the structural or thematic issues at stake.

Despite the purported strategic import of CIVMIL for donor nations, funding for NGOs to engage in such activities is generally weak or non-existent. One exception would be the USA where OFDA, a government aid agency, provides funding to INTERACTION, the national umbrella body for NGOs, to facilitate policy dialogue and participation in trainings and exercises. This provides for a secretariat capacity to support engagement by INTERACTION members with the US government and military, for example most recently on the elaboration of US guidelines on interactions with NGOs at field level.

In a number of other donor countries, NGOs coordinate joint approaches through existing networks or new CIVMIL-focused working-groups. Examples include the efforts in Denmark and Norway to facilitate dialogue between NGOs and relevant line ministries on national CIVMIL policies and operational strategies in relation to the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) operation in Afghanistan. VENRO, the umbrella body in Germany, has a humanitarian policy working-group which has developed considerable experience in joint NGO advocacy on CIVMIL at national level. NGOs in the Netherlands have also stepped-up their engagement with the government in relation to the Dutch ISAF deployment to Uruzgahn in southern Afghanistan.

Despite the importance of policies set at international level, capacity to engage is even weaker in terms of multilateral institutions. In terms of the UN, ICVA¹, SCHR² and INTERACTION, which maintain seats on the IASC³, have led NGO representation on CIVMIL policies, such as the IASC guidelines. OCHA's civil-military coordination unit (CMCS) has also recently established an 'information-sharing group', which aims to facilitate joint approaches among UN agencies and NGOs.

NGO advocacy towards NATO has largely centred in field-level policy dialogue. At international level, the European Network of NGOs in Afghanistan (ENNA) has facilitated limited dialogue on ISAF with permanent representations and EU institutions based in Brussels. VOICE, the European humanitarian NGO network, has also conducted advocacy on EU CIVMIL policy issues, most recently in relation to debates on civil protection and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.

In addition to the capacity constraint, NGO advocacy efforts are confronted by a number of challenges. Firstly, while multilateral actors such as the UN and NATO provide the framework for most international military operations, policy and - in particular - practice is determined at the national level. For obvious reasons, policy-making on defence and CIVMIL-related issues tends to be highly intransparent. Inconsistencies between policies and practice also led to scepticism on the behalf of NGOs. While policy rhetoric may emphasise the respect of humanitarian space and appropriate coordination, the military's main interest in CIMIC is defined in terms of force protection and politically-driven 'hearts and minds' agendas.

The priority attached to national interests and force protection means that international operations are highly decentralised, with significant authority delegated to national contingent commanders. While NATO operations establish nominally more command and control than UN missions, contemporary peace operations are federally comprised. The consequences of this set-up can be exemplified by the slow progress in promoting 'harmonisation' of approaches across various national contingents in the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. As a result, different approaches to civil-military relations across different provinces cause confusion and inconsistency among both NGOs and local populations. As a consequence, a number of individual ISAF contingents have sought to dialogue with NGOs operating from their donor country base. Ironically, this situation has led to a reduced humanitarian space for such NGOs in some instances if they become perceived as associated with a contested military presence.

NGOs also participate in military trainings and exercises. From the NGO perspective, the objective of such activities is to raise awareness among military officers of humanitarian principles and ways of working. Such efforts can help challenge assumptions and avoid unnecessary confusion at field level. Challenges to effective NGO participation in trainings and exercises are two-fold. Firstly, the general lack of NGO capacity to engage. Secondly, trainings and exercises are frequently poorly designed in terms of their CIVMIL aspects.

'(...) NGOs coordinate joint approaches through existing networks or new CIVMIL-focused working-groups.'

1. International Council of Voluntary Agencies
2. Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response
3. Inter-Agency Standing Committee

*(...) taking a position
on such intervention
will intrinsically
compromise their
neutrality
in a conflict (...)*

In terms of critical issues and challenges for NGO advocacy on civil-military relations going forward, I highlight the following:

- **Evidence base and definition of 'humanitarian space':** Humanitarian space is shaped by multiple factors in any given crisis. Aside from perceptions of an agency's neutrality being compromised, threats to the safety and security of staff, programmes and beneficiaries can emanate from criminality and random violence, for example. Research from the Overseas Development Institute indicates that while general levels of violence against international aid-workers have not changed dramatically, the levels of political targeting has increased by 208% over the past seven years. Thus civil-military relations must be understood in a wider context of factors constraining or enabling access, and impacting on the security of aid agencies. The principles and policies defined by NGO headquarters at the international level are inevitably distant from the complex and pragmatic arrangements to negotiate access at field level. In many countries, humanitarian principles and concepts like humanitarian space have no easy translation into local languages and contexts, leading to further complications in terms of consistent NGO positioning and strategy. This reflects the classic challenges which apply across different issues in ensuring coherence between policy and practice, and headquarters and field operations. For these reasons, NGOs are challenged with articulating a consistent and evidence-based definition of humanitarian space.
- **Military roles in civilian protection:** Civilian protection remains a contested concept. NGOs struggle with defining their responsibilities in addressing the 'harder' end in terms of protection from physical violence. Towards that end, many NGOs attempt to review their programmes to assess how 'protection sensitive' they are. The role of international military operations in civilian protection is also increasingly emphasised in both NGO operational management and advocacy. For example, NGOs in northern Uganda have sought to provide dedicated services and advocacy in support of women that experience sexual and gender-based violence. One aspect of such work has included advocacy and outreach to the international community, local and national authorities and the national police and military to promote more effective prevention and response.

Some military forces have developed guidance on protection-related tasks in operations in more permissive environments. For example, there is a considerable body of experience in coordination with humanitarian agencies, promoting civil order, provision of security for camps of internally-displaced peoples, and conducting preventative patrols. However, there is a huge gap in terms

of political will, doctrine, capabilities, training and rules of engagement on operations in more hostile environments in which there is a risk or reality of genocide, ethnic cleansing or massacres. There remains little consensus or guidance on how international forces might carry out 'the responsibility to protect'.

For NGOs, these issues throw up multiple challenges. Coercive military intervention that serves to intervene in violence or protect civilians will always be controversial. For aid agencies, taking a position on such intervention will intrinsically compromise their neutrality in a conflict, and so impact on humanitarian access. The NATO intervention in Kosovo illustrated the reluctance of international powers to deploy ground-forces, preferring to make use of aerial bombardment. It also epitomised the dangers of military intervention becoming branded as 'humanitarian', thereby blurring the proper definition of humanitarian action. For these reasons, there is considerable scope for better defining the different types of roles that military and civilian agencies can pursue, the inter-relationship between them, and their potential effects on civilian safety.

- **Humanitarian reform:** Three aspects of the global humanitarian reform process are particularly relevant to civil-military relations: the focus, or lack thereof, on humanitarian principles; reform of humanitarian coordination, and initiatives to demonstrate programme quality, learning and accountability. Concerns have been raised by a number of NGOs that recent humanitarian reform efforts have been overly top-down, UN-centric and technical in their focus. As humanitarian agencies seek to promote greater coordination and technical professionalization, maintaining a focus on core humanitarian principles remains a critical challenge. Strengthening humanitarian coordination is generally recognised as one of the weaker aspects of UN-led reforms to-date. And yet, effective policy dialogue or coordination between the military and humanitarian agencies requires effective humanitarian coordination as a prerequisite. One cannot function without the other. Lastly, advocacy on civil-military relations will be greatly aided by humanitarian reforms related to programme quality, accountability and impact assessment. NGOs need to demonstrate their added-value in delivering improved humanitarian outcomes for people caught up in crisis. As some policy-makers contend that the military is technically proficient and fast, humanitarian agencies need to demonstrate both the political importance and the programmatic efficacy of a principled-based approach.

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1. Richard Horton (2006), *Indigenous peoples: time to act now for equity and health*, *The Lancet*, Vol. 367, p. 1705-1707
2. Carolyn Stephens, Clive Nettleton, John Porter, Ruth Willis and Stephanie Clark (2006), *Indigenous people's health - why are they behind everyone everywhere?*, *The Lancet*, Vol. 366, p. 10-13

NEW REFORM TREATY FROM A HUMANITARIAN ANGLE

A VIEW ON THE EU

' (...) formalization of the status of humanitarian aid will help strengthen the emergency actions of the Union (...)'



VOICE welcomes the EU's new Reform Treaty which amends the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community:

under External action by the Union, a new Part Five shall be inserted, including an own Chapter 3 on humanitarian aid under Title III Cooperation with Third countries and humanitarian aid.¹

The Reform Treaty thus establishes a legal basis for humanitarian aid, which clarifies the situation of this policy within the EU Treaty. Humanitarian aid is also defined as a competence shared between the EU and its member states as is the case in the present situation. This formalization of the status of humanitarian aid will help strengthen the emergency actions of the Union in the world.

The text of the new chapter 3 on Humanitarian Aid follows very closely the text introduced in the text of the draft EU Constitution. It includes the humanitarian principle of neutrality, which VOICE members strongly lobbied for. However, the Chapter also reintroduces the idea of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps, a proposal VOICE members lobbied strongly against in the draft EU Constitution. While volunteers are highly appreciated and contribute widely in the NGO sector, agencies stressed the need for professional and skilled aid workers in ever more complex and dangerous field interventions.

1. Draft Treaty amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community. CIG 11/07 REV 1, point 154, page 100.

2. *Idem*, point 168, page 105.

Another concern for humanitarian NGOs in relation to the Reform Treaty is article 28 under Section 2 Provisions on the Common Security and Defence Policy, which reads

1. The tasks referred to in Article 27 (1), in the course of which the Union may use civilian and military means, shall include joint disarmament operations, humanitarian and rescue tasks, military and assistance tasks, conflict prevention and peace keeping tasks, tasks of combat forces in crises management, including peace making and post conflict stabilization. All these tasks may contribute to the fight against terrorism, including by supporting third countries in combating terrorism in their territories.

If humanitarian assistance is defined as part of the fight against terrorism, there is a real danger of warring parties perceiving humanitarian assistance as tied to a political agenda. This could compromise the ability of humanitarian workers to deliver assistance, and could endanger the lives of those workers or civilians caught up in conflict without access to aid. It is critical to maintain the real and perceived independence of humanitarian aid from any political and military objectives.

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CHAPTER 3 HUMANITARIAN AID²

Article 188j

1. The Union's operations in the field of humanitarian aid shall be conducted within the framework of the principles and objectives of the external action of the Union. Such operations shall be intended to provide ad hoc assistance and relief and protection for people in third countries who are victims of natural or man-made disasters, in order to meet the humanitarian needs resulting from these different situations. The Union's measures and those of the Member States shall complement and reinforce each other.
2. Humanitarian aid operations shall be conducted in compliance with the principles of international law and with the principles of impartiality, neutrality and non-discrimination.
3. The European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, shall establish the measures defining the framework within which the Union's humanitarian aid operations shall be implemented.
4. The Union may conclude with third countries and competent international organisations any agreement helping to achieve the objectives referred to in paragraph 1 and in Article 10a of the Treaty on European Union.
The first subparagraph shall be without prejudice to Member States' competence to negotiate in international bodies and to conclude agreements.
5. In order to establish a framework for joint contributions from young Europeans to the humanitarian aid operations of the Union, a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps shall be set up. The European Parliament and the Council, acting by means of regulations in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, shall determine the rules and procedures for the operation of the Corps.
6. The Commission may take any useful initiative to promote coordination between actions of the Union and those of the Member States, in order to enhance the efficiency and complementarity of Union and national humanitarian aid measures.
7. The Union shall ensure that its humanitarian aid operations are coordinated and consistent with those of international organisations and bodies, in particular those forming part of the United Nations system.

ICT IN DISASTER PREVENTION AND RESPONSE: EXAMPLES OF NICARAGUA AND NIGER

FIELD FOCUS

 **Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), telecommunications and satellite communications in particular, can play a key role both in prevention of humanitarian crises and in building capacity to improve disaster response. Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF), in addition to strengthening coordination and communication in an emergency by establishing telecommunication centers, is promoting and making available ICT for disaster prevention.**

After a big earthquake, a hurricane or flooding, traditional telecommunication networks are either overwhelmed or simply destroyed. The international community - particularly since the devastating Asian tsunami in 2004 - is aware of the importance of reliable communications in emergency response. Indeed, there is an urgent need for food, water, shelter, protection and medical assistance in emergencies, but all these depend on quick and reliable communications. Rapid communication when disaster hits saves lives.

The dreadful impacts of natural disasters on the lives of the population and also on the economy of a whole country have encouraged the improvement of disaster prevention and preparedness. TSF has deployed ICT for prevention systems in Niger and Nicaragua. The simplicity of this system allows it to be duplicated relatively easily elsewhere. In addition to early warning or prevention needs in natural disasters, it can provide for information sharing also in other contexts such as avian flu, AIDS and malaria.

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS: IMPROVING DISASTER RESPONSE IN NICARAGUA

Early September 2007, Hurricane Felix left hundreds of thousands homeless in the Autonomous North Atlantic Region (RAAN), one of the poorest regions of Nicaragua, a country often hit by hurricanes and flooding. More than 10 000 houses were seriously damaged, of which 8 000 completely destroyed, 90% of infrastructure destroyed, and communication systems cut off. Télécoms Sans Frontières (TSF) immediately established an Emergency Communication Centre with broadband Internet access, phone and fax lines and technical assistance which benefited more than 50 aid agencies for almost one month right at the heart of the disaster.

TSF's mission in Nicaragua, funded by the Humanitarian Aid Department of the European

Commission (ECHO), is now going beyond the emergency phase of the disaster response. TSF is strengthening the National System for Disaster Prevention, Mitigation and Attention (SINAPRED) by installing an emergency communications network in the most vulnerable and remote areas of the RAAN, where no telecommunications exist. This system, based on satellite and radio communications technology, aims at increasing the SINAPRED communication capacity, thereby improving its ability to coordinate relief and respond to the needs of the population in emergencies. Before handing the system to the government in early December 2007, TSF will also train SINAPRED staff on its usage.

NIGER: ICT IN FOOD CRISIS PREVENTION

In the summer of 2005, Niger was particularly badly hit by a food crisis. There was an unusually dry season and the country was also inundated by locusts. Information on livestock and on agricultural income from the remote areas of the country was not arriving in the capital, Niamey, in time. This information, collected manually and delivered in person to the capital, took weeks - or sometimes as long as two months - to arrive. Evidently, the national food crisis prevention system lacked capacity, in which TSF identified a possibility for the use of ICT. As a result, 12 of the most remote areas of the country were connected to the capital Niamey. This helped to protect more than 700 000 people from food crisis. At the time of writing, with continuous support from ECHO, TSF is extending the system, which will soon cover 12 million people in a total of 27 locations. While many people think that ICT is expensive, this whole prevention system only requires approximately US\$100 a month in communications costs.

Preventing food crisis in Niger or improving natural disasters response capacity in Nicaragua are two concrete examples of how ICT can have a real impact in preventing emergencies. In 2006 alone, 91 million people were affected by natural disasters for a total cost of 173 billion dollars. The prevention of natural disasters and the easing of their effects are part of humanitarian and development activities. Indeed, each dollar spent on preparing for disasters can save seven dollars to solve the problems they lead to.

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'(...) strengthening the National System by installing an emergency communications network in the most vulnerable and remote areas (...)

HUMANITARIAN ISSUES AT EU LEVEL

VOICE AT WORK

★ **The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.** Since January 2007, VOICE and its members have been actively involved in the process of developing a joint statement by the Commission, the Parliament and the Council setting out the values, guiding principles and policy scope of EU humanitarian aid.

★ **Step 1 - the EC Communication.** After the consultation process ECHO initiated with its partners and the member states, the EC Communication "Towards a European Consensus of Humanitarian Aid" was approved by the College of Commissioners (13 June 2007). VOICE welcomed the Communication since it marks real progress in terms of understanding the humanitarian imperative, the need for distinction between the different actors across the system, the complexities of the ongoing debates, and as such reflects the main messages the network has been lobbying for. These include the need for the EU to commit to the humanitarian principles, the importance of a diversity of humanitarian actors and principled humanitarian aid.

VOICE then launched a wide ranging consultation among its members concerning the content of the Communication. The outcome of this consultation was presented in the document - VOICE comments and recommendations "Towards a European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid" (July 2007). The document not only stresses the three main messages mentioned above, but also includes among others recommendations to the EU concerning funding for Humanitarian Aid, Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development, the Global humanitarian reform, the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative and Protection. At the same time the VOICE Working Group on Disaster Risk Reduction also developed policy recommendations on disaster risk reduction for the VOICE network. These two documents have constituted the backbone of the lobby and advocacy efforts the network and its members have made towards the Parliament and the member states over the last months.

★ **Step 2 - the EP report.** In preparation for the European Parliament report, VOICE was invited, as the main stakeholder of humanitarian NGOs, to give its opinion to the EPs Rapporteur on Humanitarian Aid. Many of VOICE recommendations were included in the draft report, the main messages further being reinforced by UN agencies and the Red Cross Movement throughout a very constructive dialogue and consultation process between the EP and stakeholders. Several VOICE members provided substantial input to the Report directly to the Rapporteur through VOICE. In addition, VOICE member organisations wrote letters and organised meetings with MEPs, activities which strengthened the NGO position.

★ **Step 3 - the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.** VOICE met with the Portuguese presidency to present its position concerning the draft Consensus and later this work gained support through a statement by the Portuguese NGO platform. The VOICE secretariat prepared an analysis of the first draft for members, many of them then initiating an intense lobbying of their ministries at national level. The joint NGO effort has evidently achieved solid results: In the final Presidential draft for the Council, the humanitarian principles and International Humanitarian Law are solidly enshrined. The value of a diversity of professional humanitarian actors, mentioning NGOs' essential role, is acknowledged by committing to continued funding. The use of civil protection and military assets has to be in line with international guidelines, in compliance with humanitarian principles and based on needs. In sum, EU humanitarian aid is not a tool for crisis management. In addition, the EU's commitment to disaster risk reduction, to play a more active role in humanitarian reforms and the recognition of the need for more humanitarian aid funding are all positive outcomes!

★ **Towards a new ECHO Framework Partnership Agreement.** In July 2007 ECHO officially launched the revision of the Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA). At the same time ECHO and the FPA Watch Group - facilitated by VOICE - started a consultation process, which ended in October. Although the timeframe presented by ECHO was considered extremely tight by NGOs, the latter engaged in providing comments and inputs to ECHO in order to ensure that the NGOs' perspective was taken into account.

The revision process was mainly based on the following issues: 1) continuity on the main principles; 2) proportionality of the control mechanisms taking the diversity of partners into account; 3) simplification of the procedures. NGOs will sign the new FPA in December, while the FPA Watch Group will follow closely its implementation and its effects on humanitarian operations in the field.



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VOICE out loud

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