

**FOCUS:**  
Humanitarian NGOs  
and EU diversity

*From the VOICE Secretariat*

The diversity of the NGO sector is mostly considered an asset, sometimes a limitation. However, there is also a broad variation inside the EU when it comes to the national and regional contexts in which humanitarian NGOs operate. Yet in the midst of this diversity of policies and NGO-government relations, all EU Member States recently adopted the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, an act that affirms their commitment to basic principles shared also by European humanitarian NGOs.

This issue of VOICE OUT LOUD examines NGOs' perspectives on their national governments' policies and practices. Humanitarian aid professionals from VOICE member organisations in Spain, France, Ireland, Germany, the UK, the Netherlands and Denmark discuss the impacts of their governments' policies on their operational work as well as on their advocacy efforts. By bringing together these NGOs' points of view, the common challenges that they face become clearer. At the same time, it is impressive to learn about their shared progress in gaining recognition from their governments, the EU institutions and the wider public through high quality humanitarian aid together with effective policy advocacy. Through these country perspectives, the writers illustrate what is at stake for humanitarian NGOs and why national governments can and should support their work.

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 84 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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## EUROPEAN HUMANITARIAN AID NGOS: WHERE DO WE STAND?

### EDITORIAL



In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the humanitarian movement began to develop. It was based on fundamental principles that guide conflicting parties in wars: if wounded, a soldier was immune from combat, as long as a soldier was prisoner of the enemy, he had to be treated correctly, and finally, civilian humanitarian aid workers, themselves immune from combat, were entitled to access the wounded in order to save their lives<sup>1</sup>. The idea of humanizing war was broadened with the modified Geneva Conventions in 1947 and the Additional Protocols in 1977, which extended protection to the civilian population in international and non-international conflicts. At the same time, another fundamental principle allowed impartial humanitarian agencies to access victims. The International Committee of the Red Cross, for example, is directly recognized in the Geneva Conventions.

And what is the reality today? Most of the victims in conflicts are civilians. Humanitarian agencies' access to people in need is made increasingly difficult, if not impossible. In some cases, the military delivers aid in a partisan manner to win hearts and minds of the population. Prisoners are tortured. This list of violations of International Humanitarian Law is far from complete, but it reveals a paradox: the practice of humanitarian action does not adhere to humanitarian principles, which exclude all the above mentioned acts. The warring parties do not observe these humanitarian principles when they are expelling or killing civilians. Some humanitarian agencies combine emergency relief with other activities not covered by humanitarian law, which impedes impartiality. States do not live up to their obligation to enforce humanitarian law. Armies intrude into the space reserved to humanitarians.

Today the international humanitarian system finds itself at a critical juncture. For many years we have seen an increasing number of astute scientific analyses on humanitarian work filling the shelves of public and private libraries. Governments, international governmental organizations and non-governmental humanitarian organizations have organised numerous conferences, workshops and evaluations to reflect on the future of humanitarian system. But two documents are outstanding: the *Humanitarian Response Review*<sup>2</sup> commissioned by the United Nations and the *European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid*<sup>3</sup> by the European Union. The first primarily addresses the issue of coordination. For that purpose the UN has created the cluster structure proposing the institutional framework for the various actors in the field working in the same sector, such as water and sanitation or logistics. The second document formulates the policy framework for the humanitarian aid of the European Union, including both EU Institutions and the 27 Member States. Whereas the UN-led coordination structure is already operational in several countries and subject to critical reviews, the Consensus Action Plan<sup>4</sup> to translate the EU humanitarian aid policy into practice is only beginning to be implemented. In theory, the two approaches are complementary: the UN focuses primarily on the managerial side of emergency relief, while the European initiative sets political directives for the provision of humanitarian aid.

The complementarity of the two is not necessarily self-evident. The UN, for instance, favors an integrated approach, given its overall mandate for world peace. This approach potentially dilutes the frontiers between civil and military action. Combining an integrated, or managerial, approach with the practical aspect of coordination can be problematic. The delivery of humanitarian aid is not only a technical challenge of speed, efficiency and effectiveness. How aid is being delivered is equally important, i.e. in an impartial and neutral manner.

The European Consensus, in turn, clearly emphasizes respect for humanitarian principles. The Consensus also stresses the imperative that the military and civilian domains must be kept separate, while also stressing the need for coordination. Finally, the Consensus acknowledges explicitly the importance of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The UN, independent of its postulated coordination role in humanitarian aid, acknowledged three pillars as constitutive parts of the international humanitarian system: the United Nations, the Movement of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies and the non-governmental humanitarian actors.

1. *Thinking underlying the First Geneva Convention (1864). The Geneva Conventions consist of four treaties which set the standards for international law for humanitarian concerns.*
2. *Humanitarian Response Review. An independent report commissioned by the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator & Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). (August 2005).*
3. *Joint Statement by the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission. The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. Signed 18 December 2007.*
4. *Commission staff working paper: European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid - Action Plan (29 May 2008).*
5. *European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department.*

## EDITORIAL

The future of the international humanitarian system is uncertain. The EU is the world's largest donor of humanitarian aid with collective contributions through ECHO<sup>5</sup> and individual Member States. This gives the EU leverage for influencing humanitarian aid practice in the field. But will the substantive tenets of the EU Consensus be respected in the context of the United Nations' coordination duties? It all depends on how the Consensus will be translated into concrete action. A basic responsibility resides with the non-governmental organisations. One may argue that the diversity of the humanitarian agencies represents a barrier. In reality, this diversity is not the problem, as long as all actors respect the basic principles of humanitarian action and the humanitarian principles as enshrined in International Humanitarian Law. The diversity of NGOs is, among others, a result of the different national cultures and institutional settings. However diverse they may be, they have a collective responsibility to advocate for the political directives laid down in the European Consensus in order to reduce the gap between theory and practice in humanitarian aid. This gap has grown larger since the war against terror began. The Consensus offers humanitarian non-governmental organisations at the respective national levels an ideal common basis for advocacy efforts that complement those of VOICE at the EU level. Through cooperation we can ensure the delivery of independent and impartial humanitarian aid.

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## EUROPEAN NGOS' RELATIONS WITH THEIR GOVERNMENTS

THE ISSUE - HUMANITARIAN NGOS AND EU DIVERSITY

*'European NGOs face different national realities, but they also share many characteristics and challenges.'*

 Diversity is one of the assets of the international NGO community. VOICE, network of 84 humanitarian NGOs from 17 European countries, is particularly suited to draw on this asset. VOICE influences EU humanitarian policy by assembling experts from member organizations who exchange good practices and develop policy positions.

The European NGO community is both vivid and strong. It draws on a long tradition of civil society engagement in the development and humanitarian sectors. EU legislators have considered regulating such non-profit organisations. However, so far it has proven impossible given the variety of national contexts in which NGOs operate. This article gives an overview of this diversity by discussing the relationship between NGOs and national governments.

Scandinavian NGOs have traditionally received sufficient funding from their governments and have therefore often shown less interest in EU funding. The complexity of EU funding procedures and a certain general euroskepticism have also played a role. In addition, these governments have traditionally been strong supporters of the United Nations system. In terms of humanitarian action, a few major NGOs have focused on these global challenges and have participated actively in international networks. Relationships with their respective governments are often close, though informal and on an as-needed basis.

Southern Europe's civil society looks very different due to the political histories of the countries, such as Portugal, Spain and Greece. Small NGOs with strong voluntary engagement are active, and they receive little, if any, governmental financial support. The long-term development projects often focus on countries with which they have had a colonial history, and there is less engagement in delivering humanitarian assistance. Funding derives from a variety of donors, often including local authorities. Many VOICE members form part of international NGO families such as Caritas or Oxfam and benefit from these alliances. These NGOs may also receive more donations from the general public than 'home grown' NGOs who are not internationally recognized names. They focus primarily on project implementation and do little advocacy work with respect to their governments. The government favours involvement from the military and civil protection in humanitarian activities, and the general public often also support these trends.

Major French NGOs are historically related to the Médecins sans Frontières movement and are therefore influenced by it. In addition, there are several very active medium-size NGOs with expertise on particular countries. This strong NGO community has developed quality and governance tools. Funding from the government has remained very limited, and it does not reflect NGOs engagement at all. Nevertheless, the major humanitarian NGOs often come together to lobby for relevant policy issues and to gain visibility in the media.

The UK's long tradition of NGOs specializing in development and humanitarian aid dates back to

civil society's engagement with refugees of the two World Wars. Their active involvement in advocacy and lobby campaigns on a multitude of issues have given them international recognition and has drawn media attention, lending them strong public support. They are also very engaged in NGO coordination bodies, which enables them to play a leading role in the ongoing reform of the global humanitarian architecture. UK NGOs regularly lobby the government and are consulted on relevant policy issues. They come together in the Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC) in order to present a united front to the media when emergency fundraising is required. Often UK NGOs, together with their US counterparts, are the backbone of large family alliances of NGOs leading global outreach programmes, such as Oxfam, ActionAid Alliance, Save the Children and World Vision. These families have over the years invested in developing codes of conduct and other quality tools for improved NGO professionalism in the humanitarian sector.

In contrast to the UK, German NGOs are generally medium-sized. The German NGO platform is the only one in the EU with a full-time employee for the working group on humanitarian affairs. This degree of support for humanitarian aid-related issues has led to numerous NGO position papers and to the creation of formal structures for exchange with the government, which bring together all involved parties in humanitarian aid delivery. German NGOs' work is primarily funded by the German government and the European Commission, and they receive little or no UN funding and are not very present in UN reform discussions.

European NGOs face different national realities, but they also share many characteristics and challenges. All humanitarian NGOs base their work on the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, independence and neutrality. Access to vulnerable crises-affected populations is becoming ever more difficult, and the security risks are increasing. Most NGOs are involved in both development and humanitarian work. European governments seem to increasingly channel their humanitarian funding through the UN. Funding and administrative procedures are becoming more complex with no sign of harmonization of donor requirements within the EU.

All NGOs are also concerned with the accountability and the quality of their work. The discussion on the impact of humanitarian response is becoming stronger. NGOs have to argue for their added value in a sector which has become attractive for other actors, such as the military and civil protection. In order to develop common positions, deal with shared challenges and build a stronger community, humanitarian NGOs have developed and support a number of coordination bodies and humanitarian networks, such as VOICE.

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## THE RIGHT TO HUMANITARIAN AID: UK DEBATES

THE ISSUE - HUMANITARIAN NGOS AND EU DIVERSITY

*'A key issue, is how to relate humanitarian principles to the political and politicised engagements of donor governments (...)'*

 The modest publicity that accompanied the signing of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid on 18 December 2007 in the European Parliament did little to convey the importance of that event, still less to reflect the huge amount of discussion and lobbying that led to its acceptance. The Consensus - a joint policy statement by the EU Institutions and 27 Member States - is a major achievement. Humanitarian NGOs welcome that the importance of International law and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) are made explicit from the start, and that the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence are also given a prominent place. However, no one doubts the need to push for the implementation of the policy laid out in the Consensus and of its accompanying action plan.

This article deals with three questions. How are these humanitarian principles reflected in UK NGOs' engagement with their public supporters? How has this engagement been affected by the UK legislation governing NGO work? How has the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) dealt with rights-based approaches in its humanitarian policy?

The UK has a huge number of NGOs with developmental and humanitarian interests. These range from well-known global NGOs to UK-only and sector-focused agencies. In the UK, disasters work attracts widespread public interest and support, which in turn is reflected in the number of major NGOs who are active in emergencies.

Commenting on decades of NGO fundraising and public awareness raising about disasters and for humanitarian aid in the UK, Hugo Slim observes that there has been a tendency to adopt a "philanthropic" approach<sup>3</sup>. By this he means that the messages used in the public arena have most often focused on the basic needs of the affected populations and appealed to compassion. Viewing these messages in light of IHL and broader rights-based thinking reveals that the messages either omitted the political context of the situations, or they were divorced from it.

Although there are many ideologically driven agencies in the UK, Slim describes the approach to disasters fundraising up to the 1980s in the following way: "Even the more radical agencies seldom found it in their immediate financial interests to develop a more political rights-based

consciousness with their domestic publics when appealing for large funds for suffering from war and disaster. ... An apolitical description of people as needy victims requiring generosity was more likely to generate the giving reflex than an image of people as oppressed rights-bearers demanding a duty from states and peoples across the world."<sup>4</sup> One of the reasons was the legal basis of charity work in the UK. The legal framework prohibited UK registered charities from undertaking "political" activities until recently.

Although fundraising was largely "philanthropic", the adoption of rights-based programme approaches has been under way since the early 1990s among many relief and development organisations. Slim regards organisations such as Oxfam, Save the Children, and Action Aid as having been leaders in that process. The UK Charities Act of 2006 repealed earlier legislation and re-defined the acceptable objects of charitable organisations such as NGOs to include "the advancement of human rights, conflict resolution or reconciliation, or the promotion of religious or racial harmony or equality and diversity"<sup>5</sup>. During the 1990s and early 2000s, NGOs pursuing rights-based programming had to temper the messages of their public awareness and fundraising activities so as to remain within the provisions of charities legislation. This was done with considerable creativity and imagination. Due to the long history of the "philanthropic" approach to fundraising, and the relatively recent amendment of the Charities Act, it is not clear how extensive rights-based messaging to public supporters will become. Certainly many organisations have become more explicitly rights-based in the messages they use to promote their work, but there is not a shift in that direction across the board.

The development of rights-based approaches by many UK NGOs has been paralleled in the thinking of DFID, the UK Government's major provider of humanitarian aid. Slim identifies the key changes in DFID's approach as dating to 1998 when a consultant's paper "laid out in detail the relationship between rights and development. This became the prototype for DFID's current rights-based strategy for achieving the international development targets."<sup>6</sup> That process also deeply influenced DFID's humanitarian policy, which now includes implicit and explicit espousal of rights-based approaches. These are reflected in the DFID 2006 humanitarian policy<sup>7</sup> which includes three main themes: 1) improved effectiveness of humanitarian responses 2) good donorship and

1. The text is available in DG ECHO website: [http://ec.europa.eu/echo/policies/consensus\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/policies/consensus_en.htm)

2. See particularly articles 3 and 10-16.

3. Hugo Slim "Not Philanthropy But Rights. Rights-Based Humanitarianism and the Proper Politicisation of Humanitarian Philosophy in War" Seminar on Aid and Politics ODI London, February 2001.

4. Slim Ibid.

5. UK Charities Commissions publication "Charities Act 2006 - What trustees need to know".

6. Slim Ibid.

7. Saving lives, relieving suffering, protecting dignity: DFID's Humanitarian Policy. 2006.

## THE ISSUE - HUMANITARIAN NGOS AND EU DIVERSITY

*'(...) the way NGOs engage with IHL can and should affect both the stance they adopt towards their public supporters, and also their expectations of the policies of major donors.'*

3) reducing risk and extreme vulnerability. It also states that "DFID will work with other government departments to reinforce the pre-eminent importance of respect for international humanitarian and refugee law by the UK government and internationally" and, that "Its humanitarian work is designed according to need, and is unconditional." The humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence are also highlighted.

When the donor agency of a national government dispenses aid funding, there is a dilemma: how do humanitarian principles relate to the fact that this government can be a political actor in a disaster and will want to retain right of initiative to action? DFID comments on this, noting that "the linkages between humanitarian, developmental and political action remain weak and poorly understood, limiting efforts to address the root causes of vulnerability and prevent future crises"<sup>8</sup>. DFID goes on to acknowledge the complexity of the issue of using military forces in humanitarian action and affirms this should be pursued as a "last resort".<sup>9</sup>

This approach is similar to that of the European Consensus, which affirms the priority of rights law and IHL in particular. However, in relation to political engagement by sovereign states and the EU acting on their behalf, there are general principles but not a thorough-going framework. A key issue, therefore, is how to relate humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence to the political and politicised engagements of donor governments in the humanitarian situations they seek to assist.

The lesson to take from the experience in the UK is that the way NGOs engage with IHL can and should affect both the stance they adopt towards their public supporters, and also their expectations of the policies of major donors.

Looking at these issues in the round, we can see from the UK NGOs that it is possible to develop rights-based programming even when laws constrain the way that it is communicated to public audiences. Now that the UK Government has revised its charity law, NGOs have greater freedom to develop a rich range of messages to win support from the public. Messages can include not only the basic needs of affected populations, but also consideration of the wider power structures and political contexts of action. The UK public's compassion in times of crisis is hugely valuable. In any case, NGOs

do a disservice to that if they shy away from the more complex issues of engaging with the crossover of humanitarian principles, and the need to apply those in situations where political and politicised processes cause or are substantive factors in the disasters concerned.

The UK can provide good examples of organisational change and lessons learned in relation to these issues. No one in the humanitarian arena in the UK would claim this is a finished process, but there is much to be learned from progress to date. Experience has shown that donor priorities can be influenced to adopt explicitly rights-based interests and approaches. Yet, even when these approaches are adopted, as with DFID, there remains a need to address how humanitarian concerns of impartiality and respect of principles can be combined with the politicised and political processes that occur in many complex and chronic emergencies. The issue becomes practical when discussing, for example, when and how military assets would be used in disasters.

To return to the matter of "philanthropic" and "rights-based" engagements with the public, interestingly Slim does not argue for an uncritical swing toward solely utilising rights-based approaches in public engagement. Therefore, NGOs with humanitarian concerns need to help their public supporters to develop educated and informed compassion that will enable them to engage profoundly with the political realities and rights issues that are in play in disasters.

In the European Consensus, governments make a clear commitment to humanitarian principles. However, how it relates to political processes is not fully spelt out. EU Member States will insist on maintaining their "right of initiative" and the Consensus preserves that governmental space. To preserve and develop healthy humanitarian space, European NGOs need to ensure that their governments adopt the humanitarian principles of the Consensus not only in word, but also in deed. For governments to remain responsive to humanitarian concerns, NGOs need also to play their part in ensuring that the public is informed and active in holding governments' accountable on rights issues and supportive of humanitarian aid based on principles.

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8. DFID *Ibid.*

9. DFID *Ibid.* Sections 22 - 25.



## IRELAND - A HUMANITARIAN PERSPECTIVE

THE ISSUE - HUMANITARIAN NGOS AND EU DIVERSITY

*'Engagement with military forces is best described as: we share space but want to keep our distance!'*

 **Dóchas is the Association for Irish Non-Government Developmental Organisations. It has 39 members including two of the three main NGOs from Ireland (Concern and Trocaire). While there are a number of indigenous NGOs in Ireland, we also have quite a few Irish branches of International NGOs such as Plan Ireland or MSF Ireland. Dóchas has eight sub groups including a humanitarian group that meets to promote the sharing of information and experience among Irish NGOs. Various Dóchas working groups engage with Irish Aid on policy issues.**

When the Irish Government Aid programme commenced in 1974, it had modest amounts of money for many years that grew slowly to €254m in 2000. In the 1970s and 1980s, Irish NGOs received very little support from the Irish Aid programme, mainly because the programme itself was so small. However, Irish NGOs that emerged at that time, such as Concern, Trocaire and GOAL, all had to raise significant funds from the public if they wanted to fund their programmes in developing countries. While there was, and still is, competition between NGOs for funding, over the years the three largest NGOs have enjoyed major public support, mainly because the agencies had to advertise and fundraise to secure the resources for their work. Yet the Government aid programme, resourced from taxation, remained relatively unknown to the public until much later.

There is still no NGO legislation governing the operation of NGOs in Ireland. In practice, an individual or organisation can register as a charity and commence fundraising activities almost straight away. Legislation is promised in 2009. NGOs have enjoyed a good relationship with the media. While there has been no major scandal recently, the media in Ireland have been more questioning in their approach and NGOs no longer enjoy the 'hero-type' status that they had in the past.

Ireland is not a member of NATO and over the years the country has prided itself on its neutrality. For these reasons, the Irish Military have been popular for key UN missions in places such as Cyprus, Lebanon, Eritrea and Liberia. Currently, a contingent of Irish troops is present in Chad as part of an EU force. Concern has engaged with the Irish Army training school to exchange views on humanitarian principles and the respective roles of humanitarian organizations and military forces. Engagement

with military forces is best described as: we share space but want to keep our distance!

The Irish Government committed to reach the 0.7% of GNP by 2012. Despite a recent downturn in the economy, it is roughly on line to reach this goal. Total Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 2008 is expected to be in the region of €900 million. Irish NGOs now have much greater support from the Irish Aid programme than they had 10 years ago. The Irish Aid programme primarily focuses on nine priority countries and the programme enjoyed high praise when reviewed by DAC<sup>1</sup> peers. Emergency humanitarian assistance and recovery was approximately €140 million (or 16%) of total ODA in 2007. While NGOs have received increasing amounts, mainly due to the increase in total ODA, the UN system, including CERF<sup>2</sup> and Common Humanitarian Funds, has received a much greater proportion (64%) of humanitarian funding from the Irish Government. In 2007 Irish Aid contributed €20 million to the CERF. Furthermore, in 2007 Irish Aid launched the Rapid Response Initiative (RRI), which had two main components: a Rapid Response Corps and a stockpile of emergency supplies. While the origins of the RRI can be traced to the recommendation from the TEC (Tsunami Evaluation Coalition) to develop surge capacity, some of the Irish NGOs believe it had much more to do with increasing the visibility (with media and public) of the Irish Aid programme.

Many NGOs in Ireland claim their advocacy has led the Irish Government to set and reach the 0.7% of GNP UN target. In practice, it is quite difficult for any individual NGO or Network to prove they were responsible to bring about this policy change. At the time, Ireland was experiencing strong economic growth – the so-called Celtic Tiger. For a number of years the government had large budget surpluses so it was only natural and right that Ireland, a small Island Nation, with famine ingrained in its history, with long migration and missionary traditions, should agree that the UN 0.7% of GNP should be spent on poverty. The government introduced a budget for 2009 in October 2008. Despite major internal pressures, the Irish Government maintained progress towards the UN target.

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1. Development Assistance Committee of OECD

2. United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund

# THE NETHERLANDS: SECURITY IN LOCAL AND DUTCH NGOS AND THE ROLE OF THE GOVERNMENT

THE ISSUE - HUMANITARIAN NGOS AND EU DIVERSITY

 **The Netherlands have long had a strong NGO-sector, supported by donations from the public and some half a billion euro of annual programme funding from the government. These subsidies fund some larger NGOs in development work and offer some project-by-project funding for emergency work. However, most governmental funds for humanitarian aid are channelled through the United Nations system.**

Although the support of Dutch citizens for development organisations is still one of the biggest in Europe, the press and right-wing politicians often criticise the effects of development aid. A recently published book by a Dutch journalist<sup>1</sup> criticises the humanitarian sector, accusing them of allowing warring parties to take part of the aid, targeting only those crises that feature in the media, and not applying common quality standards. This book has received extensive media coverage.

It has received far more media attention than the issue of local aid-workers' security. Needless to say, they encounter major security risks. Unfortunately, aid workers' security seems only to be a concern when Western aid workers are targeted.

Dutch humanitarian NGOs have regular contact with the Humanitarian Aid Department of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Moreover, an informal network of humanitarian NGO-workers and scientists, the Netherlands Humanitarian Panel, also meets regularly to discuss humanitarian aid issues. VOICE members in the Netherlands met in 2007 and stressed the need to come together and engage in joint action whenever needed to support the work of VOICE.

## SECURITY

In 2002, the kidnapping of a Dutch MSF-worker in Dagestan, North Caucasus, triggered Dutch NGOs and the government to reflect on "who is responsible for what and how" when organising security and safety in the humanitarian aid sector.

For the Dutch Government, the kidnapping, their ransom payment and subsequent research on security policy and practice resulted in a two-pronged approach:

1) Building capacity in Dutch NGOs by subsidising and staging good practice security trainings for staff with the assistance of the NGO CSD<sup>3</sup>.

As a result, many NGO workers have been trained for 2-3 days in security affairs both in theory and practice. Furthermore, field directors and managers have had security management training at headquarters.

2) Developing a policy that the Dutch government will assist if problems arise with Dutch NGO-workers in other countries, but not guaranteeing any results.

In 2006, the Dutch Security Network (DSN) was established. They meet at least 3 times a year to exchange best practices, policies and experiences and to discuss common challenges for NGOs. DSN has linked with the European Inter-Agency Security Forum (EISF). At present, most Dutch NGOs are in the process of improving their security management policies and practices.

For ICCO & Kerk in Actie, which engage with local partners and are hardly operational themselves, the security of local partners is of great importance. Local staff are by far the most affected by security threats. The visit of a staff member from headquarters not only endangers this staff member, but it also threatens the security of local partners. This view of security differs greatly from the typical manner that only considers the safety of expatriate staff. ICCO & Kerk in Actie rely first and foremost on the knowledge of their partners in the field because they have more information about the local security conditions.

In Afghanistan, ICCO & Kerk in Actie engaged with our local partners and the NGO CSD in a pilot initiative to review their security systems. CSD staged security management trainings for all partners. It is important to note that these trainings take Afghan NGO perceptions of safety & security as their starting point in order to make the trainings relevant. Other Dutch NGOs in Afghanistan have joined this initiative with their respective partners.

ICCO & Kerk in Actie are members of ACT International<sup>4</sup>. In ACT, a special group of security focal points and a staff member at the Coordinating Office level are engaged in capacity building in the field of security for local partners worldwide through the ACT Security Advisory Group.<sup>5</sup>

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*'(...) visit of a staff member from headquarters not only endangers this staff member, but it also threatens the security of local partners.'*

In 2006 research was done by PSO<sup>2</sup>, for which 13 Dutch NGOs were assessed regarding their security policy and practice. Some of the findings were:

- there is a need for improvements in organisational security management
- some agencies lack knowledge, skills and alertness on security management
- some agencies could improve their integration of security management into other management areas
- approximately half of the organisations were reviewing and upgrading their security management

1. Linda Polman. *The Crisis Caravane*.  
2. <http://www.pso.nl/en>  
3. Centre for Safety and Development (CSD) [www.centreforsafety.org](http://www.centreforsafety.org)  
4. Action by Churches Together (ACT) International  
5. See in the ACT manual in the ACT resources part of the [www.act-intl.org](http://www.act-intl.org) website.

## CURRENT SPANISH HUMANITARIAN ACTORS

THE ISSUE - HUMANITARIAN NGOS AND EU DIVERSITY

 **In the past, both Spanish governmental and non-governmental humanitarian aid have experienced a serious lack of funding, but these forms of aid are now experiencing both qualitative and quantitative growth. The majority of humanitarian actors have participated in international humanitarian aid initiatives, and both public and private funding has increased.**

This growth has resulted in the incorporation of new actors alongside those usually involved in humanitarian aid. In examining the present situation in Spain, one finds a diversity of organisations. Among the public donors, one finds the Ministries of Foreign Relations and Cooperation, the Ministries of the Economy, Treasury, Tourism and Trade, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Health, and the Spanish Agency for Cooperation and its Offices of Technical Cooperation in the field. In the Spanish context with strong regional governments, one also finds the Cooperation Departments of the Autonomous Communities, city councils, and municipal federations with their funds. In addition, universities are involved in humanitarian aid efforts, and they encourage student groups to increase their participation. Other social organisations, such as labour unions, business associations and private foundations have also become involved in humanitarian action.

Furthermore, among supporters of humanitarian aid, a significant number of public bodies take part in humanitarian actions, such as the military, Civil Protection Services, teams of firefighters and rescue personnel, relevant health services of the Public Administration (SAMUR, SUMA, DYA), as well as private businesses. Finally, there are also organisations specialised in humanitarian action, such as the Red Cross and humanitarian NGOs.

This multiplicity of actors results in a degree of confusion in humanitarian space as well as poses an enormous challenge for the coordination of emergency missions.

At the governmental level, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation (MAEC) is the leading body for governmental humanitarian aid. Most bilateral aid is implemented by the Spanish Agency for Cooperation (AECID). Nevertheless, other Ministries continue to manage contributions to humanitarian aid that MAEC should be managing.

In recent years, humanitarian aid was administered under the cooperation instrument. Now, however, it has become its own instrument and

is based on a strategic vision currently shared at the international level. This endows humanitarian action with its own specificity, at both the conceptual and strategic levels.

The increase in funding for humanitarian aid has been notable. By looking at the most recent data (2007), one can see that the funding increased to €237 million, an astounding 76% increase from five years ago. The budget allocation for humanitarian action has reached 6.3% of the total amount set aside for Official Development Assistance (ODA), closer to the OECD-DAC average. Nevertheless, some calculations of the expenditures attributed to humanitarian aid are debatable.

At the organisational level, a restructuring is being carried out with the creation of an Office of Humanitarian Action, which is directly overseen by the Director of the Spanish Agency for Cooperation (AECID). AECID's policy of direct engagement in emergencies will continue, and the participation of professional teams during humanitarian crises will be strengthened. Meanwhile it would be better to use the resources towards coordination and the development of and participation in international humanitarian initiatives.

The Army comprises another of the prominent Spanish actors in humanitarian action. It has increased its involvement in this area in recent years. Although humanitarian organisations do not have a monopoly on humanitarian aid, armed forces should abide by the humanitarian values and principles of independence and impartiality as a means of guaranteeing that humanitarian aid is not instrumentalised. The government should follow a clear policy of differentiating military operations from humanitarian actions. When the military carries out 'humanitarian operations' during natural disasters, clear mandates and roles must be established in order to achieve complementarity with civilian actors. It must then be overseen by a civilian body, such as MAEC, (see Oslo Guidelines<sup>1</sup>).

The multilateral amount has also noticeably increased, reaching €138.2 million in 2006, which marks a 22% increase since 2005 and exceeds the bilateral amount. Besides the obligatory contributions to international organisations, the government has emphasised its voluntary contributions to the United Nations, including funds such as CERF and UNCAP. It also gives funding to UN agencies such as UNHCR and WFP, which is included in its multilateral contributions.

*'(...) multiplicity of actors results in a degree of confusion in humanitarian space(...).'*

1. Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in International Disaster Relief - "Oslo Guidelines"

## THE ISSUE - HUMANITARIAN NGOS AND EU DIVERSITY

*'(...) accountability and transparency commitment in relation to operations and their impact.'*

In addition to the above-mentioned funding, in recent years the regional Spanish administrations have increased their financial contributions to humanitarian aid, which now makes up a third of Official Bilateral Aid. This considerable increase in budget allocations for humanitarian action by the regional governments and city councils has occurred together with an improvement of the qualitative aspects of humanitarian action. However, many elements of organisation and planning can still be improved. Among these elements, one of the greatest challenges is the effective coordination of fragmented and de-centralised support. However, this does not have to overshadow more positive aspects of humanitarian action, such as the mobilisation of local resources from civil society.

In Spain, NGOs are the most established actors in humanitarian aid. There are only a limited number of organisations specialising in humanitarian aid, and most of these form part of international NGO family networks (for example, Caritas Spain). Following the recent trends in Spanish cooperation, a significant growth in funding for humanitarian NGOs has taken place, even though the funds earmarked for the humanitarian sector are not greater than the funds dedicated to long-term development.

The most significant percentage of financing for humanitarian action comes from public subsidies. These are mostly allocated through traditional development funding instruments, which are slow and inflexible in character. While last year some humanitarian NGOs received contracts for the first time, new instruments that are more appropriate for humanitarian actions need to be put in place. These instruments should be quick and flexible to enable organisations to rapidly respond to emergencies.

Funding for humanitarian action from private donors has also witnessed an increase: it makes up 45% of the total funding of the members of the Spanish NGO platform. According to the same platform, 45% of NGOs have increased their marketing campaigns, and 35% have begun to collaborate with companies and private donors.

Organizaciones Humanitarias Españolas (OHE) are incorporating quality criteria to assure that their actions are effective and have a positive impact on the local population. According to OHE, the most experienced organisations have already incorporated quality tools, such as the Sphere Project, which help them to attain good standards in the projects they carry out. However, there are still organisations that need

to introduce these types of instruments in order to conform with good humanitarian practice.

Similarly, in recent years, efforts were carried out in areas as delicate as accountability and transparency. This began as a collective effort of the platform of Spanish NGOs following the Tsunami. Similar efforts have continued following other humanitarian interventions of great magnitude. The NGO meeting on 'Lessons Learned from the Tsunami' has resulted in a qualitative leap in the organisations' performance. Likewise, members of the Spanish NGO platform recently met for an in-depth analysis and reflection on transparency.

The NGOs are aware that accountability and transparency are important in order to be credible and professional. Therefore, there is a commitment to these values, not only in relation to financial matters but in relation to operations and their impact. This commitment is starting to become a part of NGOs' standard practices.

A consensus exists among organisations that certain aspects of humanitarian interventions need to be improved. This consensus has resulted in the first steps towards doing evaluations of humanitarian action, such as linking with the activities of the ALNAP quality initiative. Yet humanitarian organisations must go further by also committing actively to the application and protection of International Human Rights. There are many improvements that the Spanish humanitarian community should make in order to address the present challenges the sector is facing.

As for Official Spanish Cooperation, its responsibility is to move forward on important issues: to implement this year's new Strategy for the Humanitarian Action Sector, to apply the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship, and to support the implementation of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. With an eye towards the 2010 Spanish EU Presidency, the Spanish humanitarian community will continue its efforts to lobby the Spanish government for a clear commitment to support international efforts to reform the humanitarian architecture.

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## GERMANY - CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE ON EQUAL FOOTING

THE ISSUE - HUMANITARIAN NGOS AND EU DIVERSITY



Created in 1990s the platform entitled **Coordination Committee on Humanitarian Aid<sup>1</sup> (KAHH)** meets every two months and additionally in emergency sessions as necessary. It is alternately chaired by the **Humanitarian Department of the Foreign Ministry and the German NGO platform VENRO's<sup>2</sup> Humanitarian Working Group**. Meetings are hosted on a rotating basis in Foreign Ministry and NGO headquarters.

The KAHH meeting agendas are agreed upon in a participative way with a great deal of input from NGOs. Along with exchange regarding current country emergencies, humanitarian policies and issues are also put forward and debated, which gives NGOs the possibility to influence government policies.

Some examples of the broad scope of policy issues debated in KAHH and concrete examples from the past two years include:

### EU Civil protection

German positioning to Barnier-Report and other EU initiatives

### German Humanitarian Budget and Funding Guidelines of Foreign Ministry Global Humanitarian Reforms

joint conference in 2007 by VENRO, VOICE, OCHA<sup>3</sup>, ECHO<sup>4</sup> and Foreign Ministry

NGO demands to German Government and European Commission

### "Day of Humanitarian Aid" in Foreign Ministry

exposure event with active participation of NGOs

NGO/ OCHA/ICRC<sup>5</sup>-Podium debate on Humanitarian Aid in conflicts and dialogue with OCHA Coordinator Sir John Holmes

### Ban of Cluster ammunition

Dublin initiative, German and international policy

### Food crisis and humanitarian policies

German policy on food aid and food security

### Forgotten Crisis/example Somalia

demands to German Government and European Commission

One recent highlight during the German EU Presidency in the second half of 2006 was the joint initiative of German NGOs, Humanitarian Department of German Foreign Ministry and ECHO to promote a joint political positioning of the European Commission and EU Member States on humanitarian aid policy. This initiative led to the adoption of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid in December 2007 as the final product. The starting point for the Consensus process was a KAHH Meeting in September 2006. The meeting was followed up with a great deal of input and participation by German NGOs in close cooperation with VOICE. German NGOs experienced this as a window of opportunity to cooperate with like-minded humanitarian sectors of the German Government and the European Commission.

German NGOs also display good practice by participating in political exchange and debate with the German Parliament. Dialogue on humanitarian aid issues takes place, especially with its Committee on Humanitarian Aid & Human Rights, in yearly meetings and through regular updates.

As an example of recent German humanitarian NGOs' discussions with the policy makers, the following gives an insight to issues raised in the KAHH meeting in September 2008 with participation of ECHO's General Director Mr. Zangl.

Concerning the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid and its Action Plan, Mr. Zangl highlighted the importance of humanitarian principles, a needs-based approach, International Humanitarian Law (IHL), a diversity of humanitarian aid actors and connecting humanitarian aid to LRRD<sup>6</sup>. Regarding the implementation of the Consensus, he viewed IHL violations and the role of military in conflict regions as the main obstacles: "concerning war regions our main problem . . . is that role of military in humanitarian aid should remain limited." He mentioned that disaster preparedness and risk reduction in climate related emergencies remains a challenge, and he proposed that EU civil protection and humanitarian actors take the opportunity to cooperate.

On behalf of NGOs, Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe stressed the German commitment to Consensus implementation but pointed out some issues of concern. For the sustainability of EU humanitarian aid regarding rehabilitation and disaster risk reduction, the EU needs to strengthen local capacity in crisis affected areas. Additionally, regarding civil-military relations in war regions, humanitarian aid should not be part of integrated military counterinsurgency, or be drawn into the 'good versus evil' discourse of 'the war on terror.' In addition, the EC and Member States should be more critical in their support to Humanitarian UN reform particularly regarding the marginalisation of NGOs, the conflict of interests within the UN system, and the independency of humanitarian aid in UN integrated peace enforcement missions.

Finally, NGOs raised their concerns regarding German humanitarian aid funding. NGOs proposed to establish clearer roles, complementarities and links to improve LRRD work in the field. Presently, the government's humanitarian funding responsibilities are shared between Foreign Ministry (mainly responsible for emergency aid) and Ministry of Development Cooperation (responsible for development orientated transitional humanitarian aid). The Committee Chair as well as representatives of Ministries agreed upon proposals and the establishment of a mixed Government Working Group with NGO participation.

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1. Koordinierungsausschuss Humanitäre Hilfe
2. Verband Entwicklungspolitik deutscher Nichtregierungsorganisationen e.V.
3. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
4. European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department
5. International Committee of Red Cross
6. Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development

## DENMARK - ADVOCATING FOR PROTECTION IN THE GOVERNMENT'S STRATEGY

THE ISSUE - HUMANITARIAN NGOS AND EU DIVERSITY

 **The Foreign Ministry in Denmark is planning to launch a revised version of the Danish Humanitarian Strategy in the first half of 2009. During 2008, many in the Danish humanitarian community have participated actively but with some curiosity to this process.**

All humanitarian organisations (DanChurchAid, Danish Refugee Council, Danish Red Cross, ADRA, Save the Children Denmark, Médecins Sans Frontières, Ibis and Caritas), the Foreign Ministry and civil defence have met in the Humanitarian Contact group. A series of issues have been explored and debated in order to inform the development of the revised Danish Humanitarian Strategy. In addition, the Foreign Ministry has invited NGOs to partner with them. UN agencies and highly experienced members of the humanitarian community have also collaborated with the Foreign Ministry by holding high-profile and well-attended interactive events, debates and "happenings".

In these fora, the issues of protection, early recovery, global food crisis, climate related natural disasters and humanitarian space and military operations have been the highest priorities for debate and consideration. The debates have produced some exciting findings. One finding is that NGOs play an essential role by being present in the long-term and having extensive on the ground knowledge. The question remains, however, how much those findings will actually increase Danish humanitarian aid's impact by improving the lives of disaster impacted communities.

Danish NGOs have also been active in bringing a number of other crucial issues to these discussions and debates. For example, they have asked, "how does Denmark perform as per its commitments to Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHDI)<sup>1</sup>?" The interaction and connectivity between NGO actors, national governments and the UN system has also been an area of great debate. Danish NGOs have asked that Danish contributions to the UN system should be monitored as thoroughly as possible. Furthermore, government support to the UN system should be decided using the same criteria that they use when deciding to support NGOs.

In addition, DanChurchAid (DCA) and other Danish NGOs have lobbied strongly for more

attention to the issue of protection within the new Danish Humanitarian Strategy. DCA partnered together with the Foreign Ministry to create a September 2007 seminar on "Protection of Civilians-Learning from Darfur R2P"<sup>2</sup>. The seminar came with a list of recommendations for improvements both within the UN system, within the local police and within the work of the NGOs. More attention needs to be paid to sending common messages on protection. Also, priority needs to be given to the protection mechanisms which local populations and local organisations were and are using daily to protect themselves.

In 2009, DanChurchAid and its Nordic sister organisations (Norwegian Church Aid, Church of Sweden Aid and FinnChurchAid) will undertake a pilot study where longer field studies will be carried out in DR Congo, Zimbabwe, Sudan and Burma. The agencies behind this initiative have realised that without an understanding of local populations' protection practices, there is a real risk that the combined efforts of the communities themselves and those of humanitarian actors may not re-inforce and support each other. In some cases, they may even contradict one another.

For this pilot study, these organisations are seeking to obtain the support from their respective governments. On the issue of protection of civilians, the lack of genuine adherence to and compliance with existing international law, norms and standards by national and international political and military actors remain the major challenges. Therefore, the protection efforts undertaken by at-risk-communities themselves along with actions undertaken by humanitarian and human rights actors continue to play a vital and life-saving role. Efforts undertaken by these actors in order to promote protection or at least reduce risks often also lead them to play a crucial role in informing a wider public and may directly or indirectly influence policy and decision makers at both local, national and international levels.

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VOICE Board member  
DanChurchAid  
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*'(...) NGOs play an essential role by being present in the long-term and having extensive on the ground knowledge.'*

1. In 2003 a number of donor governments created GHD initiative to work towards achieving efficient and principled humanitarian assistance. 35 donors have now signed up to these principles.  
2. <http://www.r2p.eu>

## EUROPEAN NGOS AND THEIR MEMBER STATES' FUNDING

A VIEW ON THE EU



**HOW MUCH DO YOU LOVE ME?  
HOW MUCH DO YOU CARE?  
HOW MUCH DO YOU NEED ME?**

**WHEN I'M NOT THERE?  
MIKA - SINGER - 2007**

When listening to politicians who highlight the unique role of civil society, the irreplaceable actions implemented by NGOs or the extraordinary involvement of humanitarian workers, we should always ask them: how much do you love us? The question could also be: how much do you need us?

COUNTRY	ODA THROUGH NGOS <sup>1</sup>
Slovakia	44,00%
The Netherlands	19,50%
Spain	15,90%
Ireland	15,70%
Czech Republic	12,00%
Sweden	11,90%
Belgium	9,40%
United Kingdom	7,50%
Germany	7,40%
Luxembourg	6,60%
Denmark	6,50%
Austria	4,10%
Finland	3,80%
Greece	3,10%
Portugal	2,40%
Italy	0,70%
France	0,40%
Slovenia	0,12%

Looking at the actual figures gives a sense of how much support Member States actually offer to NGOs. In this field, as in many others, the European Union member states do not have a common policy.

The share of Official Development Assistance (ODA) given to NGOs in each member state is a good indicator of the level of trust and support that a government is willing to give to its civil society.

This chart may be surprising, but it provides some explanations on the structure of the European NGO community observed in the past years.

It might provide some answers to the following questions:

- Why are French NGOs so active in the Brussels' networks?
- Why have so many international NGOs opened branches in Spain?
- Why are UK NGOs so active in their country's foreign policy?
- Why have new member state NGOs not rushed to Brussels as expected?

French NGOs are known worldwide. Their strong independence and outspokenness is recognised abroad, but the level of the French ODA channelled through NGOs is the lowest among the largest European countries. This has had an impact on the development of French humanitarian NGOs in the past decades.

Some French NGOs have developed their direct marketing skills in order to get greater support from individual French donors. Others have developed their ability to get EU funding.

### NGOs in EU New Member States

In the attached statistics, information is not available for all the countries that joined the European Union in 2004 and 2006. However, of those listed, some rank very high in comparison.

Also, over the past few years, four NGOs from new Member States have become ECHO partners. VOICE, with the support of ECHO, is currently working together with NGOs from new Member States to provide opportunities for exchange on EU humanitarian policy and training on quality tools. Often NGOs are involved in development education in order to strengthen involvement and support from the public.

In 2007, among the top 12 European NGO partners of DG ECHO, 5 of them were French.

The outspokenness of French NGOs has never really transformed into real advocacy skills. Why lobby a government that is not going to fund your NGO anyway? The amount available for humanitarian aid within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was €9.2 million in 2008, and French NGOs are therefore focusing more on what is happening in Brussels than in the Paris Rive Gauche where most of the Ministries and Parliament offices stand.

Despite a without really taking into account the strategy or the interests of the other. We can blame it on our history or our culture, but money was probably a factor as well.

The French government now supports a stronger civil protection, while NGOs are still denouncing a handful of national policies, albeit unenthusiastically. Transfers of staff between government and NGOs are rather unusual, and these two worlds do not interact as much as they should.

The lack of funding from our government has kept our freedom intact in the past. We do not depend on our national authorities, but we now lack means of interacting and co-operating. Our role as NGOs is not only to be financially independent but to influence national and international policies in order to create conditions for a safer and stronger humanitarian space.

**Jean Saslawsky**

**Responsable Financements Publics et Institutionnels  
VOICE Board member  
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1. 2006 figures. Information not available for Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania. Source: Coordination SUD.

## PIECEMEAL MEASURES ARE NOT ENOUGH IN DR CONGO

### FIELD FOCUS

*'(...) conflict continues  
with almost total  
impunity (...).*

A genuine human tragedy is unfolding in the DR Congo and we cannot stand by as the conflict continues with almost total impunity.

It is now vital that humanitarian aid reaches all those at risk of starvation and disease, not just in and around Goma. Those who have sought refuge in the dense forest must also be reached. For this to happen the current ceasefire must be maintained, and agreements sought with the National Congress in Defence of the People (CNDP) and the Congolese army to secure wider humanitarian access.

There is widespread use of rape as a weapon of war, the deliberate destruction of rural livelihoods, the use of proxy militias by vested interests seeking to exploit DR Congo's mineral wealth or the complicity of elements of the Congolese army in pursuing ethnic vendettas against communities already shattered by conflict, all of which continues with almost total impunity.

The recent visits to the region by the British Foreign Secretary David Miliband, French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner and Commissioner Louis Michel, and the high level summit meeting in Nairobi on 7 November, with United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon and the African Union, must lead to a political solution between the Heads of State, not just of Rwanda and DRC, but also neighbouring countries. All have an obligation to renew their commitment towards a peace settlement on the basis of the existing Nairobi accord, signed in November 2007.

A crucial issue to resolve is the problem of the Rwandan Hutu armed group - Forces Democratiques de Liberation du Rwanda (FDLR) - who have been hiding out in eastern Congo since 1994, having fled Rwanda after the genocide. Their presence has become the *raison d'être* for General Laurent Nkunda and his forces (CNDP), who claims that his troops are needed to defend the Congolese Tutsi minority against the FDLR.

The mandate for the UN's peacekeeping force in the country - MONUC - must be clarified and its personnel bolstered with adequate resourcing to be able to supervise the disarmament of the CNDP and other armed groups in line with

the Amani process agreed in Goma in January 2008. This must also include the FDLR, who were not party to this agreement.

Fighting in recent days between a mixed group of Coalition of Patriots in the Congolese Resistance (PARECO)/Mayi-Mayi militia and the CNDP in the Rutshuru area outside of Goma, has caused a number of deaths and indescribable misery for the people who have had to flee, joining the already 250,000 made homeless by the first wave of fighting.

The Catholic Church in North Kivu is responding to the humanitarian needs of displaced populations through Caritas Goma, a longstanding partner of CAFOD in the region. While the church tries to ease the suffering of those that it can reach, MONUC must fulfil its mandate of protecting people from attacks by any armed groups or individuals.

Rather than being a source of prosperity, DR Congo's vast mineral, forestry and water resources have become a point of conflict with their haphazard and often illegal exploitation. The resources need to be managed in a sustainable and transparent way, so that revenues benefit the Congolese people instead of funding the continuing conflict. In numerous instances, localised conflict is a result of competition between different militia groups for access to valuable minerals.

In the Council Conclusions of 10-11 November, the EU condemned the human rights violations in DR Congo, called for unconditional humanitarian access to displaced people and stressed the importance of strengthening MONUC and renewing its mandate. The British Government particularly is in a unique position to influence events in the region, through its close ties with governments, especially of the DR Congo and Rwanda. The EU, including the UK, and all regional governments must commit themselves to remaining engaged until a permanent and sustainable solution to the explosive situation on the ground is attained.

**CAFOD - Catholic Agency for Overseas  
Development**  
[www.cafod.org.uk](http://www.cafod.org.uk)

*'(...) secure wider  
humanitarian access.'*

## HUMANITARIAN ISSUES AT EU LEVEL

### VOICE AT WORK

- ★ **Implementation of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.** In May, the European Commission adopted the 5-year Action Plan that will implement the Consensus in practice. NGO input, which culminated in the roundtable consultation in April, had been widely considered. VOICE has continued to advocate for the implementation of the Consensus both in Brussels and through its members in EU Member States. In the run-up to the French EU Presidency, VOICE gave a presentation on NGO expectations to the "Revue Humanitaire." Later in the autumn, VOICE shared the successful advocacy experience at the Autumn School of Groupe URD. VOICE members lobbied for NGO participation in the European Parliament / European Commission conference on promoting compliance with International Humanitarian Law (16 September, Brussels).
- ★ **The EU budget review.** In March, VOICE members developed recommendations for the EU budget review that stressed the future increase in humanitarian needs, the importance of coherence in EU external actions, and the added value of EU humanitarian aid. VOICE also called for greater attention to be given to humanitarian aid in future EU budgets. These recommendations were later presented at a stakeholder conference in November that brought together representatives from EU governments and civil society, who debated budget priorities.
- ★ **European External Action Service (EEAS).** VOICE has issued a joint paper with the European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development (CONCORD), the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) and the Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN). This joint paper raises their shared concerns about the lack of transparency and the absence of civil society involvement in the process of reforming EU Institutions. The EEAS is a new EU service foreseen in Lisbon Treaty to assist the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in fulfilling his mandate. The expectations are that the reforms, and particularly the creation of the EEAS, will improve consistency, coordination and complementarity. It is also expected that these reforms will ensure democratic accountability by involving the European Parliament and civil society in EU external action.
- ★ **The VOICE Strategic Plan 2008-2010** was adopted by the General Assembly in April. During the three-year period the network will focus on 1) advocating for the implementation of independent humanitarian action, 2) facilitating its members' collective influence with relevant EU institutions, governments and other humanitarian actors, and 3) supporting a high level of quality of VOICE members' humanitarian responses.
- ★ **VOICE's working groups** continue their efforts to influence the European institutions and EU Member States on issues at stake for European humanitarian aid NGOs. The Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) Watch Group welcomed new members in May 2008 bringing together more than 40 of ECHO's NGO Partners. It makes valuable contributions to the new FPA and continues to monitor the implementation of the new rules. The Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) working group has focused its advocacy efforts on influencing the EU Strategy on DRR in Developing Countries. The VOICE working group on EU civil-military relations is focusing on strengthening NGOs' role in policy dialogue, on advocating for stronger EU adherence to international guidelines, and on increasing coherence between policy and practice in the field.
- ★ **VOICE supports quality.** VOICE continues to promote NGO quality tools and instruments. In July 2008, VOICE supported the Sphere Project in presenting an update of its activities and has organized another two successful trainings for NGOs on the Sphere Standards, financed by DG ECHO. In November, a training on quality management in humanitarian action (Quality COMPAS) drew great deal of interest from NGOs. Further training sessions on project cycle management are upcoming in cooperation with PuntoSud.



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The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Community.

### VOICE out loud

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