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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN  
PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL**

**The mid-term review of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid Action Plan -  
implementing effective, principled EU humanitarian action**

SEC(2010) 1505 final

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid<sup>1</sup>, signed by the Council, European Parliament and European Commission in 2007, is the comprehensive policy framework governing the European Union's humanitarian aid response. The Consensus outlines the common objectives, fundamental humanitarian principles (of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence) and good practices that the European Union as a whole pursues in this domain. The aim is to ensure an effective, high-quality, needs-driven and principled EU response to humanitarian crises. The Consensus covers the whole spectrum of humanitarian action: from preparedness and disaster risk reduction, to immediate emergency response and life-saving aid for vulnerable people in protracted crises, through to situations of transition to recovery and longer-term development. It sets high standards for humanitarian action, including good donorship, partnership, EU support for the international humanitarian response and links to other actors present in crisis situations. The European Consensus remains the reference for EU humanitarian aid, has gained the recognition and respect of the humanitarian community inside and outside the EU, and has created political momentum for enhancement of EU joint efforts in this domain over the past three years.

Since 2007, the EU has provided humanitarian assistance primarily through funding of humanitarian partner organisations to deliver aid directly to people in need across the globe to ensure life-saving interventions, protection and preparedness. Together, EU Member States and the European Commission account for a substantial share of overall humanitarian aid, some 45-50 per cent of the total over the past three years. In 2009 the EU provided \$US 4.25 billion (€3.12 billion) of the total \$US 9.45 billion (€6.93 billion) of official humanitarian aid<sup>2</sup>. The past three years have continued to see the need for large-scale interventions in a few protracted crisis situations (such as Sudan, DRC and Somalia); the need to react swiftly to rapidly deteriorating conflict-related humanitarian crises (for example in Georgia, Gaza, Kyrgyzstan and Sri Lanka); and to help prepare for and respond to a growing number of natural disasters.. However at the same time the humanitarian operating environment, particularly in a small number of conflict zones, is ever more challenging, with humanitarian workers' safety and security an increasing concern. Large-scale natural disasters, (e.g. the Haiti earthquake and Pakistan flooding in 2010) have required a massive international response to meet basic humanitarian needs and to pave the way for recovery. The EU has responded swiftly using both its humanitarian aid and civil protection instruments to assist in these emergencies. This complementarity of instruments in first response to natural disaster, in line with the Consensus commitments and international guidelines<sup>3</sup>, is an important element of strengthened EU disaster response. The Commission has recently outlined specific recommendations for a reinforced approach to EU disaster response<sup>4</sup>.

However, the bulk of the EU's humanitarian aid continues to support the victims of conflict-related crises ("complex emergencies"), together with a specific focus on people-in-need in 'forgotten' humanitarian situations. Importantly, the provisions of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid cover both complex emergencies and natural disaster situations, whatever the scale, in order to contribute to meeting humanitarian needs.

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<sup>1</sup> Official Journal C 25/1 30.1.2008

<sup>2</sup> UN Financial Tracking Service Official = governmental aid

<sup>3</sup> cf section 3.6

<sup>4</sup> COM (2010) 600, 26.10.2010

This Communication seeks to reinforce the EU's collective commitment to working together to implement the 'European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid' and in particular the practical measures included in its accompanying Action Plan<sup>5</sup>. Above all the Consensus encourages a coherent, well-coordinated and effective EU humanitarian response that builds upon the complementary contributions of the 27 EU Member States and the European Commission. In the face of increased vulnerability in the poorest parts of the world, continued growth in humanitarian needs and tight public spending in a period of economic downturn, the drive for the European Union to use its collective capacities and resources efficiently to ensure the best possible impact in aiding people confronted by humanitarian crisis is greater than ever. This is the context in which the mid-term review of progress under the Consensus Action Plan has been undertaken.

The mid-term review was conducted by the European Commission with the EU Member States, and in consultation with the European Parliament and the main humanitarian partner organisations. The Action Plan covers six action areas, with 49 individual actions some of which were intended to make a 'one-off' contribution and others intended to bring about a gradual on-going shift in the EU's 'humanitarian business practice'. A detailed overview of work taken forward under the Action Plan to date, together with indications of further prioritisation for implementation within the existing action areas, is presented in **the accompanying Staff Working Paper**. This Communication does not propose a revision to the existing Action Plan, but rather a number of recommendations aimed at reinforcing EU-wide implementation efforts.

Strong EU commitment, together with a number of practical steps towards further enhancing the implementation of the European Consensus, is needed to ensure that the EU's leading contribution to humanitarian aid is effective, coherent and more widely-acknowledged.

## **2. PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN CONSENSUS ON HUMANITARIAN AID ACTION PLAN**

Given the large share of humanitarian aid it provides, the EU acting together is particularly well placed to i) ensure that its humanitarian response is appropriate, effective, based on assessed needs, and takes into account important dimensions, such as the particular needs of vulnerable population groups; as well as to ii) exercise its collective influence on the preparedness of the international humanitarian system as a whole.

The mid-term review has confirmed **good overall progress** in implementation of the Consensus Action Plan across the board. Overall, there have been notable efforts to consolidate the EU's role in all six action areas. Only a very few specific actions have been redefined in light of developments or have yet to be taken up. A number of others - for example advocacy efforts for the promotion of the 'humanitarian space' - by their very nature require continuous attention.

Since the adoption of the Consensus and its action plan, **humanitarian aid has become institutionally and legally a fully-fledged policy domain of the European Union**, building upon almost two decades of operational experience. For the first time, humanitarian aid is given a separate legal base in the Lisbon Treaty<sup>6</sup>. In Council, a specific preparatory body: the

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<sup>5</sup> SEC (2008) 1991, 29.5.2008

<sup>6</sup> Article 214 TFEU

Council Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA)<sup>7</sup> has been established and is consolidating the depth of EU exchange on humanitarian strategic issues and crisis response in monthly contacts among EU humanitarian representatives. Parliamentary interest in humanitarian issues is strong, whilst the European public remains overwhelmingly supportive of European humanitarian aid<sup>8</sup>. The clear policy framework provided by the 'European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid' has been particularly welcomed by some of the newer EU Member States, whose aid approaches have been developing fast in recent years. Also since the adoption, the European Commission's humanitarian aid department - ECHO, became, in 2010, the Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection, under the responsibility of the newly created post of Commissioner for International Co-operation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response.

With these latest organisational changes, the European Commission is leading the way to ensuring full **complementarity and maximum synergies between traditional humanitarian aid approaches and the use of civil protection expertise and assets**, both at headquarters and in the field.

Over the three years of implementation of the European Consensus, the EU has contributed strongly and rapidly, with both **funding and advocacy**, to respond to rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situations and major sudden-onset disasters, as well as to managing the challenging and changing conditions in large-scale prolonged humanitarian crises. A more **strongly coordinated approach** between EU humanitarian departments and EU field experts and representatives, which in turn supports better coordination in the international humanitarian system, helps to identify and plug critical gaps. A number of changes emerging from the Consensus, coupled with a stronger EU reflex to respond together to these difficult situations, have contributed positively to the overall effectiveness of the humanitarian response. In 2010 the EU endorsed a specific policy framework for **EU humanitarian food assistance**<sup>9</sup> with the aim of maximising its efficiency and effectiveness in accordance with best practices. Implementation of this framework is now a priority.

Under the Consensus action plan, the EU has moved forward in terms of establishing and sharing clear operational policy guidance on a range of key issues, such as the use of **cash and vouchers; nutrition in emergencies**; and integration of **protection and Disaster Risk Reduction** within humanitarian action.

The EU has also continued to review its funding approaches and **adapt to growing humanitarian needs**, including in response to more frequent climate-related small-scale disasters. The European Commission has implemented a series of innovations in its funding and administrative procedures to allow for simplified emergency funding up to certain limits, replenishment of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' Disaster Response Emergency Fund, to cover rapid response to epidemics, and to permit the implementation of humanitarian actions with a larger number of Member States Specialised Agencies. EU Member States account for the largest share of contributions to **common humanitarian funds** and the **Central Emergency Response Fund**, which have the advantage of flexibility for UN and humanitarian actors in terms of allocating resources.

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<sup>7</sup> Council of the European Union, 8367/08, 28 April 2008

<sup>8</sup> E C: Special Eurobarometer 343 'Humanitarian Aid', July 2010

<sup>9</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament – ' Humanitarian Food Assistance' SEC (2010) 374 of 31.3.2010 and Council Conclusions on Humanitarian food assistance 9654/10 of 10.5.2010.

Furthermore, the EU continues to pay specific attention to so-called '**Forgotten Crises**' - those that receive little media or international donor attention.

The EU has contributed to continued improvements in **the international humanitarian system**, by strong promotion of an inclusive and practical approach to using clusters for humanitarian coordination in the field, and by its firm advocacy and financial support to **improving needs assessment capacities** and comparability. The EU has engaged with humanitarian partners in continued efforts to ensure the quality and prioritisation of humanitarian appeals, as well as a reasonable balance of funding across crises and sectors. The EU has provided essential and continued support to ensure a **strengthening of capacity to respond at a global level**, including coordination, pre-positioning, humanitarian logistics, and safety and security of aid workers. By supporting capacity building efforts of the humanitarian community, the EU helps improve the effectiveness and quality of humanitarian aid. Enhancing preparedness and response capacities is essential both at the local level (which represents the first line of response in the event of an emergency), as well as at the regional and global levels.

Working together more closely at the EU level over the past three years has already considerably **strengthened the EU voice and collective impact on system-wide issues** in the international humanitarian response. The high-standard of commitments under the European Consensus and its Action Plan are well appreciated in the wider community of humanitarian actors (United Nations, the Red Cross/Crescent Movement and non-governmental organisations) and relevant international fora. With those commitments comes a high-level of expectation that the EU as a whole, and the individual EU donors, will act with full engagement to translate them into consistent practice in support of the humanitarian response on the ground - including **promoting coherence** with the humanitarian principles in all areas of EU external action.

**Strong and coordinated partnerships** represent an essential facet of EU humanitarian aid. The EU strongly supports a plurality of implementing partners, and underlines the need for close coordination of these partners on the ground in order to avoid overlap and ensure that humanitarian needs are adequately addressed. Finally, promoting **participative approaches** for disaster preparedness and in humanitarian aid responses is also important, and can contribute to increasing local ownership, strengthening local capacity, and increasing the effectiveness and appropriateness of humanitarian response.

### 3. SCOPE FOR FURTHER ACTION

The mid-term review shows considerable efforts have been made in implementing the Consensus and its Action Plan. Nonetheless, there remains scope for **consolidating collective EU efforts** and **strengthening individual donor commitment** on some key challenges in order to ensure the best possible international humanitarian response. This includes:

- Strategies for humanitarian advocacy and outreach; and further efforts to support the work of mandated organisations to promote IHL compliance, including with armed non-state actors<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the Protection of Civilians, S/2009/277, 29 May 2009.

- Overall sufficiency of, and more effective planning to maintain adequate funding, especially in protracted crisis situations and to ensure adequate attention to 'Forgotten Crisis';
- Clarity of global needs and measures to support most efficient use of resources;
- Reinforcement of capacity in critical gaps at a global level - including for common humanitarian services such as coordination resources, logistics, and safety of aid workers; and
- A stronger commitment to promoting the role of local actors.

Further practical progress on disaster risk reduction and environmental mainstreaming, as well as on working with development actors in transition situations and in cycles of acute and chronic vulnerability is also essential. In situations of fragility in particular, where humanitarian operations and development interventions may coexist or follow-on from one another, complementarity, synergy and timeliness between different interventions (sectoral, local, regional and national) is crucial for durable impact in pursuit of the ultimate objective of self-reliance for people affected by crisis.

The need to support flexibility of response in varied crisis situations via a diversity of partners and funding channels is well-recognised by the EU collectively, as is the need to ensure accountability and focus on results, notably through sound financial management and public communication. The EU as a whole contributes significantly to pooled funding managed by the UN and core-funding for international organizations, and as such also has a responsibility to ensure that this funding is allocated according to transparent criteria, and implemented efficiently in line with the 'Principles of Partnership'<sup>11</sup>. Some Member States and humanitarian partners have also pointed to the potential to work at an EU level on possible harmonization of partner and accountability requirements.

#### 4. IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

In 2008, the Action Plan was established by the European Commission in close cooperation with a range of stakeholders, most notably the EU Member States who have committed to implement the plan. The plan was framed around six action areas in order to provide clear outcomes of individual actions.

In terms of ensuring consistent implementation of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid and a proactive pursuit of the Action Plan, a number of systemic and design challenges have emerged in the first three years, which should be taken into account in its continued implementation.

**Ambition and range of actions:** There is a wide-range of actions covered and these are variable in nature with a mix of 'one-off' actions and those that are on-going and aim at a progressive strengthening of EU humanitarian response. This range and variability of actions

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<sup>11</sup> 'Principles of Partnership – a statement of commitment' Global Humanitarian Platform, 12 July 2007. The principles of partnership between UN and non-UN humanitarian organisations meeting together under the umbrella of the Global Humanitarian Platform are: equality, transparency, results-oriented approach, responsibility and complementarity.

has meant that a large number of priorities have been taken forward in parallel over a short period of time. During the review process, it was felt that a greater degree of prioritisation could be beneficial, focussing on a number of strategic challenges. However, at the same time, individual stakeholders are keen proponents of their specific priorities. A balance needs to be struck between strategic goals that will enhance overall effectiveness of the aid response and advancing specific practical measures that take forward collective efforts in particular areas of humanitarian aid.

**Donor capacities and leadership:** Donor capacity and resources (including staffing and humanitarian field expertise)<sup>12</sup> remain rather limited across the EU and, together with aid budgets, are under increasing pressure. At the same time humanitarian needs are on the rise. Thus, working closely together as EU donors and ensuring a greater co-ordination of efforts is all the more vital. The scale of humanitarian aid contributions, and operational expertise, varies considerably between EU donors. EU donors amongst the Member States with a long tradition of bilateral aid retain a keen interest in ensuring strong bilateral representation in the international humanitarian system, which the EU as a whole firmly supports. However, without greater burden-sharing, pooling of information and expertise, and a clearer division of labour, the EU quickly reaches its limits in leadership capacity in making a concerted contribution to improving the overall humanitarian response.

**Ensuring consistency and engagement:** While the Consensus provides a clear framing for the work at an EU level, the degree to which it has been explicitly acknowledged and built-in to existing EU donor practice and to policy development at a Member State level varies considerably<sup>13</sup>. During the review process, humanitarian partner organisations indicated that there is scope for greater engagement at the national level, in terms of dissemination and dialogue with stakeholders on how the Consensus is being implemented and by linking clearly to other actors and policy areas (notably development cooperation, external relations, defence and security) to ensure humanitarian policy is well-understood and upheld across governments.

**Monitoring progress:** Keeping in mind the issue of capacity, no EU-wide monitoring of progress in implementing the Action Plan was established at the outset, though each year an overall summary of actions has been presented by the European Commission and discussed in Council, based on the EU's general tracking of progress. This mid-term review has highlighted that a more regular monitoring of progress in implementation of the Action Plan as a whole at an EU-wide level, would be facilitated by establishing a regular process that more readily captures information on contributory actions pursued by individual EU donors. Assessing the impact of the actions taken together in achieving improvements in EU good donorship, and in supporting the wider-humanitarian system, is more challenging still. This is at present partially addressed through clear outcome and output statements per action and action area. Assessing impact is an area to which further consideration should be given in framing any successor to the current five-year Action Plan.

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<sup>12</sup> M. Spaak, R. Otto: Revised Final Report 'Study on the Mapping of Donor Coordination (Humanitarian Aid) at the Field Level', commissioned by DG ECHO on behalf of the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative, 2 July 2009.

<sup>13</sup> From 2009, under a revised peer-review framework, the 16 EU donors that are members of the OECD-DAC are asked to explain how their policy frameworks reflect the strategic orientations outlined in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.



## 5. ENHANCING THE EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY OF THE EU HUMANITARIAN AID RESPONSE

The Consensus represents a comprehensive forward-looking policy framework, which encapsulates a strong set of EU commitments that are intended to ensure an appropriate, principled and effective aid response.

To translate those commitments in the face of humanitarian crisis situations into consistent operational applicability, time after time, often in the most challenging of circumstances, requires strong political will, joint responsibility and better cross-government understanding of the humanitarian principles and modalities.

Solid implementation of the Consensus by the 27 EU Member States and the European Commission, is essential for i) **greater aid-effectiveness**, including by the promotion and cross-fertilisation of best practice; ii) for ensuring **coherence and consistency** in humanitarian aid and its interaction with other policies; and iii) for leveraging the full potential of **EU leadership** in this area in support of a strong international humanitarian system.

The further implementation of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid therefore requires:

- **Shared responsibility for success:** Meaning that all EU Member States should reiterate their commitment to working together under the Consensus and to disseminating the Consensus cross-government at a national level.
- **Division of labour:** In recognition of the different capacities and traditions of EU Member States and the limited human resources devoted to humanitarian aid in donor organizations, there needs to be a move towards a more explicit sharing out of leadership and task-facilitation.
- **Prioritization:** Including further development of joint EU action in a few key areas
- Regular **monitoring** of implementation of Consensus commitments
- Proactive **strategic exchange, dialogue and lessons-learning** between EU donors and partners to ensure good donorship links clearly with operational practice.

The specific areas that should be prioritised for further joint efforts include:

- Reinforced **advocacy for the protection of the humanitarian space**, including the promotion of international humanitarian law (both general and case-specific).
- Working with a **diverse range of actors (including the military), donors and crisis-affected countries** to ensure a strong understanding of the fundamental humanitarian principles and the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.
- Multi-donor approaches to support clear comparable identification of needs and to address critical **capacity-gaps in the international humanitarian system**, and

**strong EU leadership** in international fora reflecting the full weight of the EU's contribution to humanitarian aid.

- **Response planning** especially for protracted crises, including sharing of funding intentions, strategies and more joint missions, evaluations and lessons-learning, accompanied by better consistency in recording aid allocations.
- Continued work on sharing and dissemination of **good donorship** practices and in support of the '**Principles of Partnership**'.
- Enhanced role of the **Council Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid** (COHAFA) to ensure the distinctive modalities and specific objectives of humanitarian aid are fully respected, whilst ensuring strong links between humanitarian aid and other policy areas.
- Work with development actors on **disaster risk reduction** and on the **transition** from emergency response to recovery, including early post-crisis needs assessment.

The benefits of reinforced joint EU efforts to implement the Consensus and its Action Plan will be improved:

- **Understanding** for the fundamental humanitarian principles, and for the specificities and challenges of humanitarian response. Better outreach could be pursued with a wider range of actors and constituents from the European public, to military command structures, to emerging donors and regions and countries with crisis-affected populations.
- **Effectiveness** that emphasizes appropriateness of aid, preparedness and contingency and participatory approaches, which fully acknowledge the front-line of emergency response at a local level. Effectiveness requires a strong commitment to Disaster Risk Reduction and to tackling transition situations.
- **Efficiency**, building on our donor diversity and respective areas of expertise to ensure the best possible aid response. Better identification of needs and gaps, with more joint planning. Efficiency should seek to keep transactional costs low and to strengthen support to common services.
- **Coherence** to ensure that the EU's external action as a whole safeguards a principled humanitarian response and supports the maintenance of the 'humanitarian space' to operate in complex emergencies. The establishment of the European External Action Service provides a further opportunity to embed 'the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid' as the EU's humanitarian *acquis*.

## 6. PROPOSED FOLLOW-UP

The Commission proposes:

- (1) Identifying with EU Member States volunteer facilitators and teams of EU Member State representatives who will commit to pursuing joint action under the Consensus

Action Plan, including discussion on specific further priorities identified here and in the accompanying Staff Working Paper;

- (2) Defining with EU Member States and the European Parliament a specific outreach and dissemination strategy for the European approach to humanitarian aid, including common messages;
- (3) Engaging with the Council and the European Parliament on the feasibility of indicative long-term target setting (EU humanitarian goals);
- (4) Using the Council Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid for an annual monitoring of progress on Consensus implementation at an EU-wide and Member State level;
- (5) Renewed EU efforts on coordination of programming to ensure smooth transition from relief to long-term development aid.
- (6) A comprehensive evaluation of the impact of the European Consensus towards the end of the five-year period of the current Consensus action plan (that runs to 2013);
- (7) A revision of the EU's Humanitarian Aid Regulation to ensure it is aligned to policy commitments and allows maximum efficiencies in support of a rapid, appropriate EU-led response to humanitarian crises.

The Commission invites the Council and European Parliament to reflect on these recommendations for strengthening the implementation of the EU Action Plan and to take note of the overall progress covered in the accompanying Staff Working Paper.

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