



VOICE ASBL

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1. INTRODUCTION

Looking back on 2005. The Tsunami, and later the Pakistan earthquake, not only covered the headlines but also had a big impact both on EU politics and on humanitarian actors. The EU embarked on strengthening its crises capabilities, and both the military and civil protection units got more involved in humanitarian issues. With the Tsunami, public and official attention suddenly focused on the accountability and transparency of the whole NGO sector. Over the last 25 years, humanitarians have been working all over the globe in severe humanitarian crises. Yet the scale of the Tsunami brought about many professional challenges to the NGO sector itself.

This context led the Tsunami to become a thematic pillar around which VOICE has been particularly active. The network, as the main NGO interlocutor for humanitarian aid with the EC, monitored the above developments closely in order to document the impact these trends might have on the future of EU humanitarian aid and the role of NGOs. Together with other NGOs, its members also embarked on the documentation of the work and added value of European NGOs in the Tsunami relief effort.

Representing the interests of its members, VOICE has actively been a partner in the wider humanitarian community. The EU has become a major global player. As a result, there has been an increased demand for the expertise VOICE has built up in EU humanitarian aid and crises management. Beyond the EU, efforts to reform the global humanitarian system are growing, and VOICE is following that process together with the other humanitarian NGO networks and through its liaison with the UN.

The year brought about several organisational changes within VOICE, which have presented real opportunities to the network. VOICE members approved a new Strategic Plan for the next three years to come and elected Paul Grossrieder, former Director-General of the ICRC, as their new President. Paul's longstanding expertise in the humanitarian sector has already contributed to building the

profile of the network and given increased visibility to the humanitarian principles at the political level of the EU. Another highlight was the fact that VOICE obtained a major grant from ECHO for a project which aims at building the capacities of its members and of ECHO partner NGOs. Furthermore, VOICE has embarked on strengthening its external communication and has observed a strong interest and involvement of its members in these activities.

Looking forwards towards 2006. The overall judgement so far, both by the media and numerous evaluations, has been positive concerning the enormous NGO contribution to the Tsunami relief efforts. VOICE members have drawn many lessons from this experience and will continuously focus on improving their professionalism and quality of their work. Humanitarian NGOs will also be bringing their experiences to the table in the ongoing reform process of the global humanitarian apparatus, initiated by the UN.

With the humanitarian sector becoming a "business" attracting more actors than ever before, the independency and impartiality of NGOs remain crucial issues both at EU and at global level. VOICE will therefore continue to focus on the importance of the humanitarian principles, build links with the ICRC and monitor trends in EU crises management. More focus also needs to be given to humanitarian advocacy. The urgency for viable political solutions to be found has to be stressed in order to avoid an increase in new populations becoming dependent on humanitarian aid and more crises being ignored. VOICE, through its members, remains thoroughly committed to making its voice heard.

Paul Grossrieder
VOICE President

Kathrin Schick
VOICE Director

2. INCREASING THE RELEVANCE TO VOICE MEMBERS

VOICE is the main interlocutor between European humanitarian NGOs and the EC.

Its relation with DG Humanitarian Aid-ECHO is based on partnership and dialogue. The new version of the Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) between ECHO and its implementing partners came into force in January 2004.

The work around the FPA constitutes one of the main pillars of activities of the network. In order to monitor the implementation of the FPA, VOICE facilitated the new FPA Watch Group, which took stock of the operational difficulties encountered by NGOs due to FPA requirements. It also organised several trainings on the FPA.

With the aim of supporting its members, and financed under ECHO's 2005 Grant Facility, the Secretariat has started a project for strengthening the management capacity of all ECHO NGO partners.

1. ECHO Grant Facility

In September, VOICE was successful in ensuring a major project under the DG Humanitarian Aid - ECHO Grant Facility.

Under the project title *"Enhancing the Network"*, the objective is to strengthen NGO capacities as well as networking among humanitarian NGOs, by providing them with specific training and consolidating VOICE's networking, policy making and institutional capacity.

Participation in the activities is open to all ECHO partner NGOs. The project has a duration of 11 months.

The project includes activities, such as seminars, round tables and ad hoc working group meetings on relevant humanitarian topics (see also below). The training on the Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) in particular has proven to be very popular among ECHO NGO partners.

2. Monitoring the implementation of the ECHO Framework Partnership Agreement

In 2004, VOICE drove the reconstitution of a new FPA Watch Group (WG), responsible for monitoring the implementation of the new FPA on behalf of all ECHO partners. VOICE played a crucial role as facilitator for the consultation process between ECHO and its partners throughout 2005.

The FPA WG, comprising approximately 40 NGOs, monitored the implementation of the FPA and identified the main problems the NGOs encounter when being operational in the field. The main focus was put on the rules for procurement and the development of practical guidelines on how to interpret the rules. Throughout the continuous consultation process, the group collected examples, shared experiences and provided regular inputs. Suggestions and proposals were then submitted and discussed with ECHO's NGO Unit, with which VOICE has established a solid working relationship. The main concerns were discussed during meetings and also shared with relevant representatives in the EU member states.

In total, the FPA Watch Group and/or Task Force met 16 times in 2005:

8th February (TF), 24th February (TF), 22nd March (TF), 7th June (TF), 5th July (TF), 12th July (WG), 9th August (TF), 14th September (TF), 23rd September (TF), 3rd October (TF), 5th October (TF), 12th October (TF), 7th November (WG), 10th November (TF), 16th November (TF), 1st December (WG).

Seven meetings took place with ECHO.

In parallel to the above process, the FPA WG drafted a document entitled *ECHO-NGOs Framework Partnership Agreement - Towards a strengthened partnership*. This paper – together with another document entitled *Background document for the revision of Annex V* - is a stocktaking document in which the ECHO NGO partners look at the implementation of the Partnership and make their own analysis of the practical implementation some two years after the entry into force of the new FPA.

The former document was presented both to ECHO's Director General and at the Annual Partner meeting organised by ECHO.

In addition, VOICE has ensured through its website that all ECHO partners have access to information about the ongoing consultations. VOICE members meanwhile have been regularly updated through internal communications and practical support from the VOICE Secretariat.

The efforts by the FPA WG have been rewarded by improvements in the FPA guidelines and in a number of key technical issues related in particular to the new draft Annex V, which are being discussed within ECHO at the time of writing.

The important role of the FPA WG and VOICE has further been re-confirmed through the first ever presentation of the partners' perspective during the annual ECHO partner conference in December 2005.

3. Organising FPA Training for NGOs

The new FPA came into place when the European Commission put in place its new Financial Regulation and the so-called Implementing Rules. Therefore, a main challenge for NGOs has been the adaptation to the new procedures and rules of the ECHO operational grants.

VOICE, together with some of its members, organised FPA training sessions in order to support its members' and other NGO ECHO partners' internal capacities. During the two trainings organised in the first semester, more than 29 organisations received an introduction on how to use the new FPA.

These workshops proved so popular that VOICE decided to offer this opportunity to ECHO NGO partners over a longer period. These sessions are one of the main pillars of the Grant Facility project VOICE is currently implementing. Two of these trainings have taken place in the autumn and 33 desk officers from 20 NGOs have so far participated.

In 2005, VOICE organised four FPA training sessions:

9th-10th March, 28th-29th July, 27th-28th October, and 15th-16th December.

Increasing VOICE's training capacity - with ECHO support - has proven to be very relevant to humanitarian NGOs.

NGOs have declared an increased level of knowledge on the FPA. In 2005, a total of 80 people from 50 different NGOs received training on the FPA. Participants mostly become multipliers inside their own organisations and the feedback concerning the relevance of the training sessions has been extremely positive.

VOICE is grateful to the Italian organisation punto.sud for its support in this endeavour.

4. Other activities with DG Humanitarian Aid – ECHO

The last year saw many changes at ECHO's senior management level. VOICE has therefore concentrated its efforts in liaising and establishing good working relationships with the new management.

Michel Arrion, (former) Head of ECHO 4, spoke about the challenges to EU Humanitarian Aid at the VOICE Round Table for humanitarian NGOs in Paris. VOICE also exchanged regularly both with ECHO NGO and evaluation sectors, as well as with the Audit unit of ECHO.

Over the year, VOICE maintained regular contact with many of the ECHO desk officers in order to keep members updated on the situation in different countries. VOICE also reported back from Global Plan meetings on Sudan, Burundi and the DR Congo and was invited to several UN meetings hosted by ECHO, such as on Afghanistan.

Last year ECHO embarked on a series of evaluations/ reviews on various humanitarian topics such as HIV-AIDS, water and sanitation, cross-cutting issues, the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps, and quality assurance for medicines and medical supplies. The Terms of Reference for the reviews include VOICE as one of the main stakeholders. The VOICE Secretariat has therefore paid particular attention to linking the consultants up to existing expertise and good practices among its members.

VOICE collaboration was particularly advanced on the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (EVHAC) Review and the Article 20 Evaluation of ECHO (see below).

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5. Promoting quality and standards in Humanitarian Aid

Through its *VOICE OUT LOUD* newsletter in November 2005, VOICE stressed the fact that the humanitarian NGO sector is continuously striving for professionalism, improving the quality of its work, and becoming more transparent and accountable.

The whole edition focused on this issue by highlighting the different quality initiatives existing in the sector.

The newsletter was sent to European decision-makers and other stakeholders in the humanitarian community. In addition to electronic dissemination, more than 400 paper copies were distributed at EU level.

VOICE also regularly promoted to its members the progress in the different quality initiatives and continued its active participation in the Sphere Management Committee and attended the ALNAP biannual meetings. VOICE was present during the presentation of the French initiative to further improve the quality of the work of French NGOs. Given its presence in most EU member states, VOICE was able to promote the guide entitled "Quality Synergy - Proposals for Qualitative humanitarian actions" to the wider European NGO community.

3. INFLUENCING PRACTICES AND POLICIES OF EC HUMANITARIAN AID

Another pillar of VOICE's activities is related to policy and advocacy work around issues of importance to EU humanitarian aid.

VOICE and ECHO share a common interest around topics such as the importance of the humanitarian principles, the apolitical nature and future of EU humanitarian aid, as well as the annual funding level of EU humanitarian aid. A regular exchange with ECHO has therefore taken place both at the political and the institutional level.

When the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (EVHAC) first was proposed in the Constitutional Treaty of the EU, VOICE members were sceptical to the concept. When ECHO embarked on a study on the EVHAC last year, the network established a working group to give its input to the report and voice its concerns.

NGO involvement in the Tsunami naturally also became a theme for the network throughout the year and, towards the end of the year, VOICE documented the added value of the NGO contribution to the relief efforts. The Tsunami also became an opportunity for the development of a number of EC initiatives to strengthen its crises capabilities, among them humanitarian aid. In the interest of its members, VOICE sought to monitor the process, analyse these developments and updated its members accordingly.

1. Building the partnership with ECHO

Throughout the year, VOICE has been in regular formal and informal contact with ECHO management and staff (mostly at Head of Unit level). These contacts have enabled the network to be duly updated on the latest operational, procedural and managerial developments within ECHO. In addition, a number of key opportunities described below made it possible for VOICE to profile itself as the main interlocutor for humanitarian NGOs with the EC.

VOICE has been in contact at the EC Humanitarian Aid (HA) Commissioner's level. In spring, the VOICE Director met with the Cabinet. In September, the VOICE President and VOICE Director met personally with EC HA Commissioner Louis Michel. The meeting was the first exchange of views between the VOICE President and the Commissioner. The issues addressed included the relevance of the humanitarian principles for Humanitarian Aid and the importance of strengthening small and medium-sized NGOs, especially in the new Member States. VOICE also brought up the problems and administrative burden the Financial Regulation and the new FPA are imposing upon ECHO NGO partners.

In November, on behalf of the network, the SCHA met ECHO for the yearly Strategic Dialogue meeting, which provides the opportunity for an informal annual exchange between both sides. The ECHO Strategy for 2006 was presented, and other strategic issues such as visibility, the role of civil protection in humanitarian aid interventions, and the current status of the partnership with DG HA were also discussed.

The ECHO partners' annual conference took place in Brussels in December. At its stand, VOICE provided participants with its latest information material, such as the newsletter, the Tsunami Information Pack and the "Dossier" drafted by the FPA WG. More than 200 copies of both the Tsunami Information Pack and the newsletter were distributed. During the plenary session of the Conference, VOICE made an intervention giving its view on the NGO - ECHO Partnership. It is the first time that such an intervention took place in the framework of this annual ECHO event, thereby increasing VOICE's profile as a network and creating precedence for future conferences.

2. Providing input to the evaluation of DG HA - ECHO

ECHO is currently undergoing an evaluation. This comes as a follow up to the so-called 'Article 20' evaluation of ECHO carried out in 1999. The objectives of this current evaluation are to look at how ECHO has implemented the recommendations of the 1999 evaluation over the period of 2000-2005. The implementation of the requirements under the EC's reform programme is also being reviewed. The consultants are also considering ECHO's implementation of the requirements of the so-called three Cs (Co-ordination,

Complementarity and Coherence) referred to under the Maastricht Treaty EU development cooperation. Finally, the implementation of the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative is also being appraised.

The outcome of this evaluation could have an impact on how EU humanitarian aid will be implemented in the future and VOICE therefore welcomed the possibility to put forward its opinions. The Director, in consultation with the VOICE Board, met with the consultants twice stressing the importance of DG HA for EU humanitarian aid and of the partnership with NGOs as the main group of partners. Other issues discussed included the involvement of civil protection and the military in humanitarian interventions, operational aspects of ECHO NGO partners, the issue of linking relief, rehabilitation and development, as well as the implications of the FPA on humanitarian NGOs.

3. Review concerning the establishment of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps

In the wake of the Tsunami and the EU strengthening its crises capabilities, ECHO launched a review concerning the possible creation of a European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (EVHAC). VOICE and its members, who had already worked on this issue following the draft EU constitution, set up a working group (WG) in order to give its in-put to the study.

Up until December 2005, the WG was actively involved throughout the consultation process. Members met with the consultant in July, soon after his initial briefing with ECHO. They raised their concerns for young untrained volunteers to be employed in complex and often dangerous humanitarian missions. The WG also stressed the need for volunteers to be trained and professional, and the need for a definition of the volunteer concept taking into account the different European models in existence. It also drew the consultant's attention to the fact that a possible EVHAC could have a negative impact on the development of local capacities and provided contacts for the consultant's field visit to Sri Lanka. The WG provided input to the questionnaire sent by the consultant to all humanitarian NGOs, and promoted this survey to the members of the network. 25% of VOICE members contributed to the questionnaire.

On behalf of its members, VOICE also wrote to MEP Nirj Deva stressing the importance of local involvement in disaster relief, rather than European volunteers being sent to the affected region. Two EC consultant teams involved in a study on a European Peace Corps and on strengthening volunteering in Civil Protection, also contacted VOICE in order to learn about the position of the network. VOICE stressed the importance of complementarity between the different EC measures being proposed.

4. Post Tsunami humanitarian aid

Given the scale of the Tsunami, it was only natural that many of VOICE's activities during 2005 were linked to the follow up and the monitoring of the relief efforts financed by the European Commission.

By mid January, VOICE, together with CONCORD (European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development), published an Open Letter in the European weekly "European Voice." The two networks raised a number of concerns and stressed the role of the EU in the international donor community to ensure that pledges are delivered according to humanitarian principles and in a development perspective.

VOICE participated in four meetings organised at the European Parliament by MEP Nirj Deva on the relief for Tsunami-affected countries. The overall purpose of these meetings was to share and pool ideas on how to best meet the needs of the tsunami-affected regions. The meetings gathered representatives of different EC services, ambassadors of affected countries and NGO representatives. VOICE and different member organisations participated actively in these meetings. At the last meeting in October, VOICE outlined the overall efforts undertaken by NGOs in terms of project evaluation and quality initiatives, both in terms of accountability and quality standards.

The public event organised by VOICE in May 2005 in the framework of its annual Forum and General Assembly, focused on the changes for the humanitarian sector that the tsunami has possibly brought about. Three speakers from a variety of sectors came to set the framework of the debate: UN Humanitarian Response Review Team Leader, Mrs. Adinolfi, Professor at the Institute of Political Studies of Grenoble, Mr. Eberwein, and Senior Humanitarian Coordinator at Oxfam-UK, Mr. Luff. The need for reform of the global humanitarian system,

the role of the media, as well as the need to not forget other humanitarian crises, were some of the issues which were debated.

In June, six months after the tsunami, the EU and UN-OCHA made a balance of the international aid provided to the affected region during a conference organised by the Luxembourg EU Presidency in Luxembourg. The importance of transparency and accountability was at the heart of the discussions, together with other issues such as future actions and lessons learned. This high-level event was chaired by Luxembourg's Minister for Development Co-operation and Humanitarian Action Jean-Louis Schiltz, and was attended by the EC Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid, Louis Michel and the head of the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Jan Egeland, as well as by UK representatives of the next Presidency and the Red Cross. Kathrin Schick, VOICE Director, was invited by the Luxembourg EU Presidency to speak on behalf of the NGO community. Her intervention focused on the ongoing efforts of NGOs for more quality and professionalism in the provision of aid and also gave concrete examples of NGO fundraising accountability and transparency mechanisms.

Last summer, VOICE and CONCORD decided to launch a common initiative to profile the contribution of the European NGO community to the Tsunami affected populations. With the financial support of 18 member organisations, this project has been successfully implemented with the production and dissemination of the Information Pack entitled "*Tsunami one year after. NGO Aid intervention and future challenges*" drafted by European NGOs.

In November 2005 in Brussels, a conference was organised by both networks, chaired by "Die Zeit" journalist, Petra Pinzler. During this conference, key representatives of European humanitarian and development NGOs – including partners from the South - presented their first lessons learned from their tsunami interventions. In order to ensure a sustainable recovery in the Tsunami affected areas and as a follow-up to the Open Letter published in January, recommendations to the EU institutions were presented. Some 80 participants attended the conference, including representatives of EC DG Humanitarian Aid and DG External Relations, the European Parliament, Member States, Embassies of affected countries, and the UN Office of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for

Tsunami Recovery. The Conference was also covered by the European press, and relayed by VOICE members on their websites.

The Tsunami Conference jointly organised by VOICE and CONCORD in November attracted the attention of the following European media: Agence Europe, Katholische Nachrichten-Agentur (Catholic German News Agency), TERRA VIVA and the Czech National Radio.

5. Monitoring the development of EU crisis management

After the Tsunami, the EU and the European Commission embarked on several initiatives to strengthen their crises response capabilities. The Tsunami also saw an unprecedented involvement of other EU actors, such as civil protection units and the military, in the relief efforts. These developments raise several questions about how EU humanitarian aid will be impacted by these new trends in the future.

Throughout 2005, VOICE has monitored these developments closely and sought to continue the analysis of how these changes may affect humanitarian NGOs in the future.

Given the complexity of the issues, VOICE has also followed the evolution of EU crises management in relation to humanitarian aid, and its Secretariat is now recognised as having expertise in the matter, which it regularly shares with its members. Special attention was also paid to references made to the EVHAC (see also above).

In its January Open Letter to the attention of European Decision-makers in relation to the Tsunami, VOICE drew the attention to the need that the EU and its Member States should work to distinguish clearly between apolitical civilian humanitarian capacities and political crisis management efforts.

At the last VOICE General Assembly, Mr. Javier Nino Perez from the DG for External Relations gave an update on the Rapid Response Mechanism and on the civilian crisis management tie-ins with humanitarian interventions. In November, VOICE members and the Secretariat participated in the EC Conference "Enhancing Civilian Crisis Management Capabilities", which included a workshop on the security of aid workers.

In order to strengthen the dialogue with the EU Military staff, members from the VOICE Board and the Secretariat participated actively in the debate at the third Conference on Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC), organised by the Council of the European Union in October.

In order to stay close to the issue of crisis management, VOICE has been in contact with other relevant "reflecting" stakeholders such as the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO), the Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG), the Stimson Center, the International Security and Information Service (ISIS) and the German Military Academy.

6. Monitoring the place of NGOs

Over the last year, there has been an increased focus on the accountability and transparency of NGOs both by the European institutions and the media. As European network of HA NGOs, VOICE - and in particular its Board - followed the trends which may affect the identity and reputation of NGOs. Throughout the year, VOICE monitored some of the most relevant public statements and decisions related to the transparency of HA NGOs.

The network regularly updated its members on developments and decided to focus the November issue of its *VOICE OUT LOUD* newsletter on quality and accountability initiatives in the humanitarian NGO sector. This newsletter was widely distributed to the European institutions and other stakeholders. Furthermore, the joint VOICE-CONCORD Information Pack on NGO interventions in the Tsunami relief effort (see also above) documented the added value of NGOs and gave concrete examples of how some of the funds collected from the public were spent by NGOs. The challenges to the entire humanitarian community under the extraordinary circumstances were also documented. Whenever relevant, VOICE also drew the attention to the fact that NGOs complying with the ECHO FPA's requirements have to report on a range of quality, accountability and transparency criteria.

7. Monitoring EC humanitarian aid funding

Throughout the year, VOICE – through the FPA Watch Group – monitored the impact that the Financial Regulation and the EC Implementing Rules have had on the funding

of NGOs (see also chapter one). The NGOs have drawn the attention of the EU institutions to the fact that the administrative burden on NGOs receiving EC funding has increased considerably and that the current procurement rules are often unrealistic when confronted with extremely difficult conditions in the field.

VOICE shared these concerns with some members of the European Parliament and MEP Pierre Shapira of the EP Development Committee put a written question forward to the Commission asking for clarification on the above-mentioned issues. A reply was sent by Commissioner Louis Michel, stressing the importance of the VOICE network's efforts to monitor and provide training in the FPA.

In July, VOICE participated actively in a hearing organised by the Green Group in the European Parliament. This event entitled "*The Commission could do better*" saw the presentation of two reports on the obstacles that civil society organisations encounter when applying for EU funding. One of the reports was produced by a group of NGO networks and included a chapter on Humanitarian Aid.

Throughout 2005, VOICE closely monitored the overall funding decisions for EC humanitarian aid during a year marked by two major natural disasters (the Tsunami and the Pakistan earthquake). The EC Emergency reserve had to be used twice in order to ensure sufficient humanitarian funding, and this confirmed the importance to maintain this EC tool also in the future. The process of ECHO's 2006 budget's development was also closely monitored.

Later in the year, VOICE remained in close contact with ECHO in order to assess the various implications of the difficult Council discussions on the so-called Financial Perspectives for 2007-2013. This is the multi-annual spending plan guaranteeing a financial framework for EU activities over a period of years. It then became clear that the possibilities for an increased level of humanitarian aid funding were small given the overall agreement reached by the EU Member States. Throughout the process, VOICE regularly updated its members and two VOICE members in the UK and France wrote respectively to the European Parliament and to the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, stressing the need for increased funding and the ring-fencing of the EC Emergency Reserve.

4. BEING AN ACTIVE PARTNER IN THE WIDER HUMANITARIAN COMMUNITY

Given its representativeness as well as the expertise the network has established on relevant EU policies, VOICE has played a role in the wider humanitarian community. The VOICE Board actively went out to meet NGO members in EU Member States whilst the Secretariat strengthened its external communication with the active contribution from members. The network also collaborated with several other networks and platforms and built ties with the UN.

1. VOICE visibility

In December 2005, VOICE disseminated a new edition of its external newsletter *VOICE OUT LOUD* to EU decision-makers and to the wider humanitarian community, including at ECHO's Annual Partner Conference, where some 200 copies were distributed.

The VOICE newsletter intends to contribute to the understanding of the professional reality of humanitarian NGOs to the European institutions and other relevant humanitarian stakeholders. This particular issue focused on transparency and accountability initiatives in the humanitarian NGO sector. Through their articles, a number of VOICE member organisations shared their views and experiences on these topics (see also above). Through their active participation they contributed to VOICE's visibility and positioning as a humanitarian network.

The visibility of VOICE within the wider humanitarian community has further been consolidated throughout the year with speaking engagements or public interventions of the VOICE Director at major events and conferences organised by key humanitarian stakeholders in Brussels and in the EU.

In 2005, the VOICE Director was specifically invited for presentations at the following key events:

Briefing for Terre des Hommes International, Meeting with German Members of Parliament at CONCORD, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee meeting (21st March), the CONCORD/EPLO Security Symposium, the Tsunami Conference of the EU Luxembourg Presidency, the European Conference on International Volunteering organised by FORUM, the Symposium organised by German Agro Action on Development in Emergency disasters, and the Annual ECHO Partner Conference.

VOICE has also been active in awareness raising on humanitarian aid. On invitation by the Belgian Ministry for Development Co-operation, it participated in a European Conference on Public Awareness and Development Education for North-South Solidarity (May). VOICE also met with OFDA/USAID and the Norwegian Foreign Ministry. It also participated in an Internship Fair in Brussels (March). VOICE has been regularly providing information following requests from European university students mainly specialised in International Affairs.

Finally, direct access to VOICE's website was made possible for visitors of other stakeholders within the humanitarian aid community such as ECHO, Reliefweb and ICVA. VOICE has also kept informal contacts with media representatives (the European Voice, Terra Viva).

2. Cooperation with CONCORD

In 2005, VOICE and CONCORD (European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development) set up a joint working group in order to work on topics where collaboration between both networks has an added value for their members. This action also contributed to strengthening the co-operation between both networks.

The common working group decided to focus on the thematic issue of NGO involvement in the relief and recovery in the Tsunami-affected regions. This topic was selected by the members of the group because important topics such as the link between relief, reconstruction and development (LRRD), accountability and transparency, and the role of NGOs are of concern to all NGOs, independent of whether they focus on humanitarian and/or development aid.

The added value of this thematic cooperation has been the possibility to make the link between emergency relief and development aid, and to present common policy recommendations to the European Union as well as having joint positions for the press.

The concrete output of this cooperation between the two networks was a common statement in January 2005, an Information Pack on the Tsunami relief entitled "One year after", a press release and a conference (see also above).

3. Support to the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition

In 2005, donors, UN agencies, NGOs and the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement constituted an informal grouping under the name of the Tsunami Evaluation Coalition (TEC). Its purpose is the promotion of a sector-wide approach to evaluations of the tsunami response in order to optimise sector-wide learning, and to develop an evaluation coordination mechanism. VOICE has been supporting the TEC by promoting its existence to its constituency and, more importantly, by inviting its member organisations to contribute to TEC's work by providing information on ongoing evaluation activities undertaken in the Tsunami affected areas, thus supporting the TEC in building up an "evaluation map". VOICE also shared the Tsunami Information Pack among the members of the TEC.

4. Meeting the French NGO community

In October, VOICE organised a Round Table in Paris for the French humanitarian NGO community. It was the first time that VOICE organised such an event in a EU Member State. This Round Table focused on "*Challenges for EU humanitarian aid and NGOs*". It gave VOICE's Board (SCHA) the possibility to better understand the main concerns of the French ECHO partners and particularly those of the network's members. Furthermore, the round table also represented an opportunity for networking and for VOICE to demonstrate its relevance and present its activities.

This event was organised in close cooperation with Coordination SUD, the French platform of aid NGOs. It was hosted by VOICE member Médecins du Monde and supported by ECHO. It included contributions by the VOICE President Paul Grossrieder and the former Head of ECHO 4, Michel Arrion. 30 people participated representing over 16 organisations.

5. International Volunteering

Over time, VOICE has built up expertise on the various volunteering schemes at EU level – notably the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps (EVHAC), but also the European Civilian Peace Corps and others (see also above). In September, VOICE gave a speech at a European Conference on International Volunteering. It was organised in London by FORUM, which is a network of organisations

engaged in international volunteering and a member of the CONCORD network. This conference was the opportunity for VOICE to give an update on the above-mentioned EU volunteering initiatives and the possible implications these might have on the humanitarian NGO sector.

6. Contacts with the United Nations

VOICE has been in active contact with the UN and its agencies on humanitarian issues. One key issue has been the Humanitarian Response Review (HRR) commissioned by the UN late 2004 and which is a global study on humanitarian response capacities. In April, the VOICE Secretariat as well as a number of VOICE members attended a HRR meeting in Geneva where the NGOs discussed with the Review team several concerns such as inventories, benchmarking, and coordination and deployment. VOICE also encouraged its members to participate actively in the Review by completing the Questionnaire specifically produced by the consultants.

VOICE has been liaising with the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC), which brings together the major UN agencies and three of the humanitarian NGO networks. In March, VOICE was invited for the first time to an IASC meeting, giving its opinion on the EU initiatives to strengthen its crises capabilities.

The UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery, Mr. Bill Clinton, has thanked VOICE member NGOs for their support to the tsunami-affected countries. Mr. Clinton asked NGOs to support the DAD (Development Assistance Database) Systems, which register tsunami recovery resources and results. Early November, the VOICE Secretariat also met with a representative of the above-mentioned UN Office, who attended the Tsunami Conference organised jointly by VOICE and CONCORD.

VOICE participated in a testing of ideas for the new Financial Tracking System (FTS) section of "Reliefweb", which is the "UN"-website providing humanitarian information on complex emergencies and natural disasters. The objective of this section is to track UN appeals and funds but also to follow the global financing of humanitarian emergencies by public and private donors. A number of suggestions made by VOICE concerning the layout and user-friendliness of the section have actually been integrated into the website.

5. ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS OF THE NETWORK

During the last annual General Assembly, the network elected a new President, welcomed eight new members, and approved a new Strategic Plan setting its priorities for the 2005 – 2007 period.

1. VOICE General Assembly (Forum)

On 28th and 29th April 2005, VOICE organised its Annual Forum, consisting of a round table and the General Assembly (GA). The GA saw 73% of the membership of the VOICE network represented (60 out of 83 NGOs), while eight NGOs joined the network as new members. The highlight of the GA was the election of a new President for VOICE. Members also elected two new members to the Board (SCHA) and reconfirmed two of its existing members (see also below).

In 2005, eight new organisations joined the VOICE network: ADRA Denmark, ADRA UK, FIDA International (Finland), HealthNet International (Nederland), Médecins du Monde (Belgium), Medicos del Mundo (Spain), Médecins du Monde Greece, and Medicos do Mundo (Portugal).

A General Policy Resolution was adopted by the network, which called upon EU institutions to respect humanitarian principles, and stressed the importance of access and security for civilian humanitarian actors, as well as the need for professional and well-trained actors in crisis response and disaster management. The partnership between VOICE and ECHO was enhanced by a presentation by ECHO Director-General, Mr. Antonio Cavaco, who recognised the network as a "fundamental interlocutor for ECHO".

The 2005 Forum was particularly important as the network adopted a new Strategic Plan for the 2005-2007 period. The VOICE network modified its overall Vision and Mission, which now read as follows.

The overall **vision** of VOICE is to alleviate human suffering in the most affected parts of the world by increasing the impact of humanitarian intervention.

The **mission** of VOICE is to promote the interests of its members towards the EU, and the quality and effectiveness of their humanitarian action by:

- Promoting and protecting humanitarian principles in order to support crisis-affected populations;
- Providing an interface for member humanitarian organisations and the relevant European institutions, including through collective action such as advocacy and lobbying;
- And sharing information on best practice and policy developments in the humanitarian sector.

The **objectives** of the Strategic Plan outline the direction the network intends to follow over the next three years:

1. To increase the VOICE network's relevance to its members in relation to their operational reality, and to enhance the "VOICE community" among its members;
2. To strengthen VOICE's authority vis-à-vis the European institutions and the wider humanitarian community by demonstrating the unique role and added value of the network;
3. To engage actively in the development and coherence of humanitarian policies and procedures, especially at the EU level and in matters particularly concerning NGOs;
4. To maintain VOICE's financial independence and strengthen its resources.

The General Assembly also adopted the Work Program for 2005, which complements the Strategic Plan and outlines the activities necessary to achieve the strategic objectives.

It is worth noting that by approving the Strategic Plan, VOICE members also commit themselves to supporting these objectives and related activities.

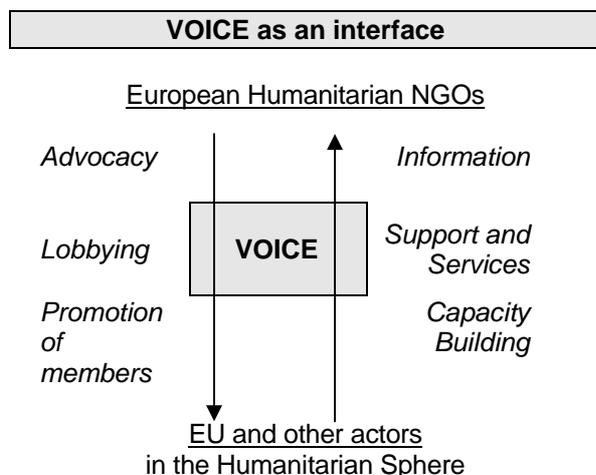
2. VOICE communication

The monthly electronic *VOICE FLASH* newsletter is the main pro-active vehicle to disseminate information within the network. It provides VOICE members with the latest update on humanitarian aid issues within the European institutional framework, the activities of the VOICE Secretariat over the last weeks, and with any other relevant information and/or initiatives from the humanitarian community (VOICE members, UN, Red Cross, Quality networks etc.). The Secretariat has received very positive feedback from its members both concerning the content and the timeliness of the *FLASH*. In 2005, eight *FLASH* editions were sent by e-mail to over 180 addresses per edition.

Members also have access to relevant information through the VOICE website. The VOICE website has been regularly updated and new VOICE documents have been put on the site.

A strong focus was given to upgrading the external communication tool, the biannual *VOICE OUT LOUD* newsletter, by getting members to take part actively in the writing. The Secretariat produced one new edition of this external newsletter, which aims at contributing to the understanding of the professional reality of humanitarian NGOs among the European institutions and those interested in the humanitarian community.

Finally, - though high presence in the media is not a strategic priority for VOICE per se - VOICE maintained contacts with media specialised in covering EU matters (European Voice, Terra Viva, etc.), particularly during the joint VOICE - CONCORD Tsunami Conference, when the two networks produced a press release (see also above) as well as a "Questions and Answers" document to be used by members in their work.



6. VOICE STRUCTURE

1. The VOICE network

The VOICE network is made up of operational NGOs active in humanitarian aid worldwide. It is the only European network of its kind.

In 2005, the popularity of the network was confirmed when VOICE welcomed eight new members. At the end of the year, 92 organisations were members of VOICE.

The members represent the diversity of the NGO sector. The 'top five' fields of activity of VOICE members are (in order of importance) health, shelter, food and nutrition, water and sanitation, and, as horizontal issues, children and LRRD. VOICE members are from 15 EU Member States (+ Norway and Switzerland). More than 96% of VOICE members are ECHO partners.

VOICE members are dedicated to saving lives and preventing suffering, and bringing swift humanitarian relief to the most vulnerable groups. They strive to base their work on international humanitarian law and principles. They are committed to follow Codes of Conduct and set high quality standards of professionalism and expertise. Where possible, their interventions include a participative approach with their local partners and they seek to link relief, rehabilitation and development in order to ensure sustainability of their interventions.

2. The VOICE Board

VOICE's Board is called the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Aid (SCHA). Its role is to ensure that VOICE adheres to its purpose and statutes. It decides on major directions and policies, provides accountability and ensures proper management. Board members contribute their professional experience, on a voluntary basis, and as such represent the broader membership of the VOICE network.

At the 2005 VOICE General Assembly (GA) last May, VOICE members elected a new President for the network. Paul Grossrieder is the former Director General of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and has long-standing field experience. He holds a degree in theology and a PhD in international politics and has written numerous articles on humanitarian affairs. Mr. Grossrieder is Swiss.

The GA elected Anna Jefferys and Angelo Simonazzi as new SCHA members and re-elected Jane Backhurst and Dominic Crowley for another mandate of three years.

At the end of 2005, the VOICE SCHA was composed of Paul Grossrieder (VOICE President), Benoît Miribel (Action Contre la Faim), Dominic Crowley (Concern), Will De Wolf (Cordaid), Rainer Lucht (Diakonie), Angelo Simonazzi (Handicap International), Jean Saslawsky (Médecins du Monde), Anna Jefferys (Save the Children UK), and Jane Backhurst (World Vision).

Cecilie Bjørnskov-Johansen (DanChurchAid) left the SCHA in June for a field assignment.

Over the last year, the SCHA has begun to visit EU Member States in order to learn more about the concerns of its members, to raise awareness of EU humanitarian policy issues, engage in debate with the wider humanitarian community, and actively promote the network. The SCHA also met with DG Humanitarian Aid for the annual Strategic Dialogue Meeting. All together the SCHA met five times over the last year.

The 'Bureau' is the executive body of the SCHA for administrative tasks and guarantees the financial and legal accountability of VOICE. The Bureau consists of Paul Grossrieder (President), Jean Saslawsky (Treasurer), Will De Wolf (Secretary) and the Director (without a vote). The Bureau met four times in 2005.

3. The VOICE Secretariat

The VOICE Secretariat is in charge of implementing all the activities related to the VOICE Annual Work Programme – in line with the Strategic Objectives. It is also in charge of the financial management of the association, under supervision and general control of the VOICE SCHA.

The core staff of the VOICE Secretariat comprises the Director, the Communication and Advocacy Officer and the Administration Officer.

Samantha Chaitkin and Asja Hadzmusic left the network during the last year in order to take up new challenges and move on in their careers. We would like to thank both of them for their dedication and commitment to the network over the last three years.

We welcome Gilles Van Moortel as the new Communication and Advocacy Officer and Kenan Hadzmusic as the new Administration Officer. With the approval of the Grant Facility Project, Sonia Giannone joined the team as Project Co-ordinator for the duration of the project. During the year, the team has also been supported by interns. We would like to thank Anne-Sophie Bonnet and Eglantine Suray for giving their time and contributing to the achievements of the network on a voluntary basis.

Since last July, the VOICE Secretariat shares its office premises with VOICE member Norwegian Refugee Council – Europe, which set up a new office in Brussels.

4. Finances

The financial independency of the network has always been of importance to the network. The core structure with three staff is therefore mainly financed through the membership fees of its members. In 2005, the total budget of the core costs of the VOICE Secretariat was 249,182€. This amount was made up of 87% membership fees and of 13% from other sources.

The extra costs incurred for activities of the joint VOICE/CONCORD Tsunami initiative were covered thanks to the generous financial contributions of VOICE and CONCORD members.

7. VOICE Members 2005

Austria

- CARE Österreich
- CARITAS Österreich
- Hilfswerk Austria
- SOS Kinderdorf International
- World Vision Österreich

Belgium

- CARITAS Secours International Belgium
- Handicap International Belgium
- OXFAM Solidarité – Solidariteit Belgium
- Médecins du Monde Belgium

Denmark

- ADRA Denmark
- ASF Dansk Folkehjælp
- Dansk CARITAS
- DanChurchAid – Folkekirkens Nødhjælp
- Danish Refugee Council – Dansk Flygtningehjælp
- Mission East – Mission Øst

Finland

- FIDA International
- FinnChurchAid
- World Vision Finland

France

- ACF – Action Contre la Faim
- ACTED – Agence d'Aide à la Coopération Technique et au Développement
- CARE France
- CARITAS France (Secours Catholique)
- Handicap International France
- MDM – Médecins du Monde International
- Première Urgence
- Secours Populaire Français
- Solidarités
- Triangle "Génération Humanitaire"
- TSF – Télécoms sans Frontières

Germany

- ADRA – Adventist Development and Relief Agency Germany
- ASB – Arbeiter Samariter Bund Deutschland
- CARE Germany
- CARITAS Germany
- DWHH – GermanAgroAction
- Diakonie Emergency Aid – Diakonisches Werk der EKD
- Johanniter Unfall Hilfe Bundesgeschäftsstelle
- Malteser Hilfsdienst
- Medico International
- World Vision Germany

Greece

- Médecins du Monde - Greece

Ireland

- CONCERN Worldwide
- Trocaire
- World Vision Ireland

Italy

- CARITAS Italia
- CESVI – Cooperazione e Sviluppo
- CISP – Comitato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo dei Popoli

Luxembourg

- CARITAS Luxembourg

The Netherlands

- Cordaid
- CARE Nederland
- HealthNet – TPO
- ICCO
- NOVIB – Oxfam Netherlands
- World Vision Nederland
- ZOA Refugee Care

Norway

- NPA – Norwegian People's Aid
- Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)

Portugal

- AMI – Fundacao Assistencia Medica Internacional
- Medicos do Mundo - Portugal

Spain

- Acción contra el Hambre
- ActionAid Alliance Spain – Ayuda en Acción
- CARITAS Spain
- Intermón-Oxfam
- Medicos del Mundo
- MPDL – Movimiento Por La Paz, El Desarme y la Libertad

Sweden

- CARITAS Sverige
- Church of Sweden Aid – Lutherhjälpen
- IAS–International Aid Services Sweden
- PMU Interlife Sverige
- Star of Hope International

Switzerland

- ACT– Action by Churches Together
- Lutheran World Federation
- MEDAIR

United Kingdom

- Action Against Hunger
- ActionAid
- ADRA UK
- CAFOD – Catholic Fund For Overseas Development
- CARE UK
- Christian Aid UK
- CORD
- Health Unlimited
- IRC UK – International Rescue Committee UK
- Mercy Corps Scotland
- Merlin
- Oxfam GB
- SCF – Save The Children Fund UK
- Tear Fund
- World Vision UK