



**VOICE STATEMENT
ON THE HUMANITARIAN AID POLICY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

VOICE, a network representing some 90 European NGOs active in humanitarian aid worldwide, is calling on the EU Member States and the EU institutions (the Council, the European Commission, and the European Parliament) to ensure that the Humanitarian Aid policy of the EU and its Member States is in line with the humanitarian principles enshrined in International Humanitarian Law (IHL) - humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

EU Humanitarian Aid policy should also seek to ensure access to populations affected by humanitarian crises, and should be implemented by a diversity of adequately resourced humanitarian actors, specifically non governmental organisations (NGOs) and other professional humanitarian actors (the Red Cross Movement and the United Nations). EU Humanitarian Aid policy must respond to the needs of the most affected and vulnerable populations in a manner that is proportional to their level of need.

In December 2006, the European Commission (EC) initiated a policy debate on key elements of the European policy framework for Humanitarian Aid. This initiative will lead to an EC Communication on Humanitarian Aid which will give the strategic policy orientations of the EC and to the Council Conclusions by the end of the German Presidency (June 2007), and beyond.

In this process, the VOICE network calls on the EU, its institutions and its Member States to commit to the following:

1. Respect the humanitarian principles essential to access populations in need:

Access to populations in need is an obvious pre-requisite to the delivery of humanitarian interventions. We believe that this access can best be achieved through adherence and promotion of the humanitarian principles and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) by governments and humanitarian actors. This is vital as the access to populations in need is increasingly difficult, the security for aid workers is deteriorating, and the humanitarian space is shrinking.

Consequently, the VOICE network calls on the EU, its institutions and its Member States:

- to promote and advocate for universal respect for IHL and take stands in the case of violation of IHL in all relevant fora, thus implementing the Council of EU Guidelines on promoting compliance with IHL by third countries;
- to ensure that EU political decisions do not have negative humanitarian consequences in third countries; equally, EU humanitarian aid should not be instrumentalised nor integrated in any way in EU political, security or military agendas;

- to maintain structures and mechanisms for the design and management of EC humanitarian aid which ensure its effective disbursement in line with humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality¹.

2. Diversity of civilian humanitarian actors – particularly the NGOs – in the delivery of EU humanitarian aid

EU (both EC and Member States) resources for humanitarian aid should be allocated to professional humanitarian actors who have a proven track record in the delivery of humanitarian aid. As part of civil society, the work of NGOs is an active expression of European solidarity worldwide. Poor aid delivery and any lack of accountability and transparency of the use of public funds would undermine the overall support of the European public opinion to EU humanitarian Aid.

Consequently, the VOICE network calls on the EU, its institutions and its Member States:

- to continue to support the diversity of humanitarian civilian professional organisations – particularly the NGOs – and their approaches in aid delivery, as this diversity of interventions, fields of expertise and actions has proven its worth;
- to build partnerships with the humanitarian NGOs, and to increase the level of funds accessible for humanitarian aid allowing the NGOs to continue to play an essential role in the delivery of EU humanitarian aid – as partners of the Member States and the EC;
- to commit to and promote the principles of inclusiveness, accountability, and transparency in the UN humanitarian reform process; actors on an equal footing should be given preference over an overly UN centralised approach - this is notably crucial in the framework of the UN clusters approach;
- to ensure a diversity of funding resources for EU humanitarian aid and that budgetary means for new funding mechanisms such as the CERF (UN Central Emergency Response Fund) are not at the expense of existing funding sources.

3. Principled delivery of EU humanitarian aid

EU military forces intervene in areas of political or strategic importance. By definition, they are the extension of political priorities and are not impartial, neutral or independent. Should the military be increasingly involved in the delivery of humanitarian aid, the lines between civilian humanitarian actors and the military would be blurred. This would lead in the long term to the erosion of humanitarian principles, reduced access to affected populations and potential implications for the security of professional humanitarian workers.

Civil protection is also under the responsibility of national governments; their interventions outside the EU are not based on IHL. Although specific assistance provided by civil protection can prove to be of added value, there have been occasions in the past when these inputs may have been based on available supplies rather than on identified needs; and there is the potential for civil protection interventions to duplicate the work of existing professional humanitarian organisations, create confusion and impact negatively on the effectiveness of EU aid delivery.

Consequently, the VOICE network calls on the EU, its institutions and its Member States to ensure that - in accordance with the Guidelines on the use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief (the 'revised Oslo Guidelines' of November 2006) and the Guidelines on the use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to Support UN Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies (MCDA Guidelines, 2003) -:

¹ These principles are enshrined in the Humanitarian Aid Council Regulation 1257/96 and in the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief

- the role and mandate of the military are clearly defined, particularly in conflict situations where the impartiality of NGOs and the acceptance of their independence are crucial in order to guarantee safe access to disaster victims and the efficient humanitarian aid delivery;
- humanitarian aid is being implemented first through humanitarian NGOs, the Red Cross Movement and UN agencies; military entities should not take an implementing role, and military assets should only be used as a last resort when the capacities of civilian actors are overstretched and there is no civilian alternative; but even then, this should fall under civilian leadership;
- civil protection outside the EU has a clear mandate and role, concentrating in filling specific gaps in the provision of assistance, such as search and rescue in natural disasters, particularly in the first phase of the emergency; the crucial concept of “last resort” for the use of civil protection assets should be kept;
- use of military assets and civil protection intervention are based on the knowledge and needs of the affected community, coordinated with the humanitarian actors and integrated with their assistance efforts.

Brussels, 5 March 2007

VOICE (*Voluntary Organisations in Cooperation in Emergencies*)

is a network representing some 90 European 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 EU on emergency aid, relief, rehabilitation and disaster preparedness and promotes the values of humanitarian NGOs.

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