



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 28 January 2013

5791/13

**PE 40
INST 44
COHAFA 14
DEVGEN 24
PECHE 36
COMER 12
CADREFIN 17**

NOTE

from: General Secretariat of the Council
to : Delegations

Subject: Meeting of the European Parliament's Committee on Development (DEVE) on
21-22 January 2013 - Summary record

The meeting was chaired by Ms. Joly, Verts/ALE, FR. The agenda was adopted (item 1). The minutes of the meeting on 6 December 2012 were approved (item 2). The Coordinators' decisions and recommendations of 13 and 18 December 2012 were adopted (item 3).

4. Chair's announcements

The Chair encouraged DEVE MEPs to participate in electoral missions, which take place primarily in a number of ACP countries and have objectives related to DEVE's core areas of interest (enhancing democracy and human rights). She referred to a letter sent to the HR asking for a better balance between AFET and DEVE MEPs participating to those missions.

5. **Announcements by the Commission**

The Commission representative announced three upcoming publications, notably a Communication by end of February on a decent life for all and the post-MDGs objectives, one on maternal health and child nutrition and a report on the food facility.

6. **Question Time**

There were no questions to the Commission.

7. **2011 discharge: EU general budget, Section III, Commission and**

8. **2011 Discharge: 8th, 9th and 10th European Development Funds (EDF)**

Items 7 and 8 were taken together.

The Rapporteur for the opinion M. Berman, S&D, NL (responsible committee: CONT) presented the main content of his draft opinions. He referred in particular to the 5% margin of error mentioned in the relevant report by the Court of Auditors.

In reply, the Commission representative (DG DEVCO) explained some of the reasons behind those errors and informed the committee about a number of administrative measures adopted with a view to reducing the margin of error pointed by the Court of Auditors. He indicated that there was a need to evaluate the overall needs in qualified staff across delegations and to proceed to redeployments. He noted that there was a lack of qualified staff in all EU delegations posted in Africa. He pointed out the high turnover of contractual staffing in delegations, which had consequences in terms of training needs and available expertise. With regard to the budget, he referred to an agreement between EEAS and DEVCO to ensure that there was a balance in the use of the staff from one institution for the other one and on a mechanism for cooperation within delegations concluded between the two institutions. He indicated that those elements would be highlighted in the activity reports of both institutions. In reply to some questions by MEPs on control of the payment of salaries to soldiers recruited in the context of the mission in Somalia, he referred to an independent audit to be published in coming months on this issue.

- Deadline for tabling amendments: **24 January 2013, 17.00**,
- vote on 19 February 2013

9. Fishing opportunities and the financial contribution provided for in the Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the EU and the Republic of Madagascar

The rapporteur for the opinion Ms. Lövin (Verts/ALE, SV) (responsible committee: PECH) in presenting her draft opinion highlighted a number of positive aspects of the draft FPA. She however criticized the confidentiality clause as a step in the wrong direction and considered that the European Parliament should not give its consent to a draft agreement involving a country under the Article 96 procedure of the Cotonou Agreement at least until the elections have been held in April of this year and the resulting political situation had been evaluated.

Ms Joly, Greens, EFA, FR, Mr. Cashman, S&D, UK and Mr. Neuser, S&D, DE expressed support for the conclusions drawn by the Rapporteur.

The Commission representative clarified that the confidentiality clause was aimed at ensuring the appropriate data protection and not at reducing transparency. On the political situation in Madagascar, he referred to a recent statement by the High Representative, stressed that fisheries agreements did not have the same objective as development aid and that postponing the conclusion of this agreement would not necessarily serve the objective of more sustainable fishing in the region.

In reply, the rapporteur considered that the conclusion of this agreement would not deliver the right message before the elections and stated that the principles the EU agreed on ought to be effectively implemented in a systematic manner.

- Deadline for tabling amendments: **28 January 2013, 12.00**
- Vote on 19 February 2013

10. Establishing the European Voluntary Humanitarian Aid Corps EU Aid Volunteers

Following a presentation of pilot projects by the Commission representative, who indicated that the lessons learnt from this exercise fed into the draft Regulation, the Rapporteur Ms. Striffler (EPP, FR) noted that this kind of professional experience could enable the young people participating in this programme to acquire valuable professional skills and find their first job thanks to this first experience. She called for a needs-based selection of candidates and for a selection valuing a diversity of profiles. She referred to the difficult discussions in COHAFA on budgetary issues.

MEPs welcomed a project which was very much reflecting the EU's solidarity values (Cortés Lastra, S&D, ES) and paid tribute to Ms. Georghieva for her contribution on this project, while expressing concerns at the chances of an agreement at Council level on an adequate budget to ensure the success of the project and asking clarifications on the issues of training, networking of volunteers, of the language to be used and on allowances (Newton-Dunn, ALDE, UK, Theocharous, EPP, CY, Neuser, S&D, DE).

In reply, the Commission representative indicated that the Commission was developing a training programme, based on existing training programmes developed in various organizations, and that there would then be a call for tender for this training to be provided by external organizations. On the issue of languages and of networking, the Commission was still reflecting on possible solutions.

He clarified that allowances were not meant in any way to be a substitute of a salary, but that volunteers had to be able to sustain themselves and should not pay for the costs related to their volunteering. On costs, he admitted that there were indeed concerns about the cost of the initiative. He noted that the most expensive part of it was deployment.

11. Recommendation to the Council on the UN principle of the 'Responsibility to Protect' (R2P)

The rapporteur for the opinion Mr. Cashman (S&D, UK) (responsible committee: AFET) in presenting his draft opinion recalled the set of principles and the three pillars leading the international community in implementing this principle.

In the exchange of views which followed, M. Goerens, ALDE, LU considered that the basic documents of this principle was the best one on the links between insecurity and poverty and on the distinction to be made between direct and underlying causes of a conflict.

The EEAS representative stressed that this principle was one of the key priorities of EU action in the UN and that indeed conflict prevention was essential.

The rapporteur recalled that there was no binding power related to the implementation of this principle.

- Deadline for tabling amendments: **30 January 2013, 12.00**
- Vote: **19 February 2013.**

12. Special Report No 13/2012 (2011 discharge): ‘European Union Development Assistance for Drinking-Water Supply and Basic Sanitation in Sub-Saharan Countries’

The representative of the Court of Auditors presented the findings of the audit led by his institution aimed at checking whether EU development aid in the field of water supply was providing good and efficient results through the evaluation of 23 projects in sub-Saharan Africa. He indicated that the outcome of the audit was showing a mixed picture and had provided evidence that the majority of projects were not sustainable in practice, although looking very good on paper. He highlighted the recommendations of the Court of Auditors asking the Commission to systematically check compliance with its recommendations and the sustainability of projects.

The rapporteur for the opinion Ms. Zaborska, EPP, SK recalled the importance of water policy measures as a precondition to meet the MDGs, noted that the importance of this factor was recognized by the UN which has designated a special Rapporteur on water Mrs. Albuquerque and suggested the organization of a hearing to be followed by an initiative report. On the Court of Auditors' findings, she referred to her draft opinion on the issue.

In the long debate which followed, Mr. Guerrero Salom, S&D, ES echoed the rapporteur in stressing the strategic importance of water access issues, which could even lead to conflicts. He considered that helping improving access to water was therefore a contribution to food security and peace as well as to MDGs achievement. He considered that the Court of Auditors' report illustrated the difficulties of implementation of projects related to this objective of facilitating access to water. He asked the Commission about the means used to ensure the traceability of funds allocated to this objective.

M. Goerens, ALDE, LU noted that the Court of Auditors was pointing to the difficulties related to ownership of beneficiary countries and to the sustainability of projects and wondered whether the Commission should not focus its action on governance issues and on the capacity of countries to manage budgetary aid rather than on technical projects, given the scarcity of financial resources available.

Ms Joly, Greens/EFA, FR expressed serious concerns at the findings by the Court of Auditors given the amounts concerned (over 1 billion euros).

Following a general statement by the Commission representative notably on the use of budget support and support to good governance, M. Deva, ECR, UK and M. Goerens, ALDE, LU considered that the Commission's replies were not satisfactory and asked further questions on ways to refocus projects which are not giving the expected results. Ms Joly suggested the possible creation of a new control procedure for such cases. The representative of the Court of Auditors clarified the method used by the Court of Auditors to evaluate projects.

The rapporteur noted the large convergence of views among MEPs on the findings of the Court of Auditors' report and the need to ensure that EU aid is used in an effective way.

The Chair indicated that the deadline for amendments was expiring on 31 January and that the vote on the report would take place on 19 February 2013.

13. Coordinators' meeting

In camera

14. Millennium Development Goals - defining the post-2015 framework

A hearing entitled "Millennium Development Goals and beyond 2015 - a strong EU engagement" was co-chaired by Filip Kaczmarek (EPP), Michael Cashman (S&D), Keith Taylor (Greens). Following an introduction by Eva Joly, Chair of the Committee on Development, Andris Piebalgs, European Commissioner for Development made a general statement on the issue.

Panel 1 was co-chaired by: Michael Cashman and Keith Taylor and focused on the issue "Millennium Development Goals - lessons learned and limitations in a changing landscape". A debate followed an intervention by the invited speakers Rebeca Grynspan, UN Under-Secretary-General and UNDP Associate Administrator, Tanya Cox, Save the Children, Cliona Sharkey, Trocaire, Irish National Platform, and by the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States.

Panel 2 on the "potential shape and scope of a post-2015 development framework - a strong EU engagement" was chaired by M. Kaczmarek. A debate followed a presentation of a European Parliament External Study on the post-2015 development framework (coordinator, Dr Pedro Morazan (Sudwind Institut, Germany) and a European Commission overview on "a strong EU engagement in the post-2015 development framework".

Invited speakers participating in the debate were David Nabarro, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General on Food Security and Nutrition, and Vitalice Meja (Kenya), Coordinator of Reality Aid and member of the steering Committee of the Campaign for People's Goals Debate

15. Trade and investment-driven growth for developing countries

The draft opinion (Rapporteur for the opinion: M. Svensson, EPP, SV, responsible committee: INTA) was adopted by unanimity.

16. For a comprehensive EU fishery strategy in the Pacific region

The draft opinion (Rapporteur for the opinion: M. Ponga, EPP, FR, responsible committee: PECH) was adopted by unanimity.

17. The impact of the financial and economic crisis on human rights

The draft opinion (Rapporteur for the opinion: M. Taylor (Verts/ALE, UK, responsible committee: AFET) was adopted by unanimity.

18. The situation of women in North Africa

The draft opinion (Rapporteur for the opinion: M. Crețu, S&D, RO, responsible committee: FEMM) was adopted by unanimity.

19. Association of the overseas countries and territories with the European Union ("Overseas Association Decision")

The rapporteur Mr. Tirolien (S&D, FR) in presenting his draft report indicated that the current association created in 2001 was expiring end 2013, and that its renewal was an opportunity to review its challenges and objectives. He referred to the recent hearing organized by DEVE.

M. Ponga, EPP, FR considered that the Commission proposal was a good one while announcing a number of amendments on the points to be improved, notably on the role of MEPs.

M. Goerens, ALDE, LU also referred to the European Parliament's role. He noted that part of the financing was coming from the EDF and regretted that the EP was not involved in the decision-making process since the EDF was not yet included in the EU budget.

The Commission representative stressed that one key objective of the OAD was to enhance the OCTs' competitiveness and inter-regional cooperation.

The rapporteur stressed the need to promote further simplification of procedures, taking into account of the fact that OCTs generally have limited administrative capacities.

- Deadline for tabling amendments: **28 January 2013, 12.00**
- Vote on 19 February 2013

20. Preparation of the multiannual financial framework regarding the financing of EU cooperation for African, Caribbean and Pacific States and Overseas Countries and Territories for the 2014-2020 period (11th European Development Fund)

The rapporteur Mr. Tirolien (S&D, FR) recalled that the EP was not formally involved in the decision-making process since the EDF was still outside the EU budget, while expressing the wish that the EP's views as outlined in his report would nonetheless be taken into account. He referred to MFF negotiations under way and regretted that development cooperation policy as a whole and the EDF in particular would be the most hit by the proposed EU budget cuts.

M. Ponga, EPP, FR, announced amendments on aid effectiveness and advocated a separate instrument for OCTs. M. Martinez, EPP, ES recalled the history of the debate on the inclusion of the EDF into the EU budget and suggested that the ACP Joint Parliamentary Assembly be the one to exert the parliamentary control suggested by the Commission.

The Commission representative provided a number of clarifications, stated that all ACPs would continue to benefit from the EFD despite differentiation, and that parliamentary control should be a posteriori. He indicated that the Commission was supporting the "budgetization" of the EDF as of the post-2020 MFF and an increased role of the European Parliament, and illustrated the current role of ACPs' national parliaments on parliamentary control of the EDF.

M. Goerens, ALDE, LU was critical of the overall bargaining on the EDF in the current MFF discussions.

The rapporteur concluded on the need to hold a debate on the modalities of a parliamentary control of the EDF.

- Deadline for tabling amendments: **29 January 2013, 18.00**
- Vote on 19 February 2013.

21. Recommendation to the EEAS and to the Council on the 2013 review of the organisation and the functioning of the EEAS

The rapporteur for the opinion Ms. Schnieber-Jastram (EPP, DE) in presenting her draft opinion indicated that the European Parliament wished to enhance the level of cooperation with the EEAS. M. Guerrero Salom, S&D, ES suggested that DEVE should be involved in the debate on the EEAS. M. Goerens, ALDE, LU expressed a rather positive opinion on the overall functioning of the EEAS since its creation. He expressed the wish that the HR would formally subscribe to the Consensus for development.

M. Martinez, EPP, ES paid tribute to the action by the EEAS and the HR. He considered however that the system of staffing, by which national diplomats were detached for a few years as not adequate and suggested the creation of an EU diplomatic school to be run by the Florence University institute.

The EEAS representative Mr. Fernandes Shaw indicated that the HR's instructions for the EEAS review were for the EEAS staff to be on a listening mode, including on delegations' functioning. He stated that much could certainly become to improve the EEAS functioning and that joint programming was progressing. He took note of the requests by MEPs.

The rapporteur concluded that this evaluation only two years after the EEAS' creation was a difficult exercise and that it had to be done in a constructive spirit. She expressed confidence that the EEAS would be an even better instrument in a few years' time.

- Deadline for tabling amendments: **30 January 2013, 12.00**

22. Irish Presidency priorities in the area of Humanitarian Aid -

M. Joe Costello, Irish Minister for Development, delivered the speech in Annex.

In the brief exchange of views which followed, Ms. Striffler, EPP, FR expressed concerns on the course of negotiations on certain aspects of the proposal on a voluntary corps, Mr. Goerens, ALDE, LU, welcomed the Minister's interest for the forgotten conflicts and Mr. Martinez, EPP, ES paid tribute to Minister Costello for his past action as MP and expressed satisfaction for the outlined priorities of the IE Presidency and full support to its future work.

Ms. Joly, Greens/EFA, FR expressed concern at the foreseeable budgetary shortages for EU humanitarian aid. Mr. Cashman, S&D, UK referred to the issue of human rights clauses in international trade agreements and wondered how EU humanitarian aid could be made more visible.

In reply, Minister Costello

- Reaffirmed the IE commitment to meet the ODA objectives and to have a universal approach on the MDGs on the occasion of their post-2015 review;
- Agreed that IE had a very "hands-on" approach which ensured a good visibility to its aid action and illustrated this fact with examples of concrete projects to ensure water access to local populations in Ethiopia;
- Agreed on the need to have a human rights' clause in all trade agreements;
- Briefly referred to IE's priorities in the field of development (LRRD, hunger, nutrition and climate change, post-2015 MDGs) and outlined the IE's work programme for the months to come, which could be further discussed after the FAC segment on Development in May;
- Invited all DEVE MEPs to attend the informal Council of Development Ministers on 11-12 February.

The Chair Ms Joly thanked the Minister and announced that the HR would attend the DEVE committee at its meeting next March.

23. Any other business

24. Next meeting(s)

- 18 February 2013, 15.00 – 18.30 (Brussels)
- 19 February 2013, 9.00 – 12.30 and 15.00 – 18.30 (Brussels)

**Appearance of Minister of State for Trade and Development, Mr. Joe Costello, T.D. before
the European Parliament Committee on Development (DEVE), 22 January 2013
Address on Ireland's Humanitarian Presidency Priorities
CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Madame la Présidente, Honourable Members, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues,

I am delighted to have this opportunity to appear before you today in order to share with you Ireland's priorities for the next six months under our Presidency work programme for humanitarian affairs.

Please allow me to state, at the outset, Ireland's commitment to working closely with the European Parliament on this, and other portfolios. We look forward to deepening the already positive working relationship between the Parliament, Council, and Commission over the next six months.

As you know, Ireland has long prioritised our programme of humanitarian assistance as a bilateral donor - a programme which we are proud to maintain, notwithstanding the economic challenges with which we, along with fellow Member States, are currently faced.

As a country, we are equally proud of the leadership and generosity of the European Union – both the European Commission (through DG ECHO) as well as Member States – in providing ongoing life-saving humanitarian assistance to those communities, countries and regions around the world who are most in need.

The aim of the Union's humanitarian action is to provide assistance, relief and protection for people who are victims of natural or man-made disasters in third countries. Today, the European Union as a whole is the world's biggest humanitarian aid donor and a key international actor in providing disaster relief. Taken together, the Union and its Member States represent some 45% of the global funding for humanitarian aid.

The EU's humanitarian aid is provided primarily through the funding of partner organisations. Currently, these include some 200 partners comprising the UN, Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, as well as NGOs and some Member States' specialised agencies. In 2011, humanitarian aid provided by the Commission totalled €1.15 billion and reached some 117 million people in 91 countries. An estimated 42 % of this funding was spent on 'protracted crises'. In the last five years an average of €1 billion has been provided annually, helping nearly 150 million of the world's most vulnerable people.

The Union's humanitarian action is strongly supported by its citizens. A recent

Eurobarometer survey shows that public support for EU humanitarian aid has increased again, with 88% Europeans supporting the EU's funding of humanitarian aid in spite of the economic crisis and associated pressure on public finances.

It is clear that much good work is being done and many lives are being saved. Nonetheless, we must always challenge ourselves to achieve more; to deliver our assistance more effectively; to ensure that our assistance is delivered in a targeted and principled manner; and to ensure that we are fully accountable, both to our own citizens and to the vulnerable populations we seek to serve.

It is in this context that I would like to present to you today the main elements of Ireland's Presidency Work Programme. I would also like to take some time to touch upon some of the most pressing humanitarian challenges with which we are currently faced, including Mali, Syria and its neighbouring countries and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Work Programme

In introducing Ireland's Presidency Work Programme, I would like first to congratulate the previous Presidency Trio (Poland, Denmark, Cyprus) for their significant achievements. We will seek, over the next six months, to build upon the solid foundations that they have laid and to bring forward the ongoing dossiers with which they have so ably dealt, while at the same time working with the incoming Trio (which also includes Lithuania and Greece) to create further positive momentum.

In particular, the Irish Presidency will aim to deliver on four key priority action areas:

Enhanced coordination

Our first major priority will be to ensure that EU humanitarian assistance is delivered in as effective and timely manner as possible.

Ireland will support efforts to enhance coordination between the EU and its Members States in relation to the EU's ongoing humanitarian response to complex, man-made emergencies and to natural disasters worldwide.

Whilst our attention is, inevitably and justifiably, drawn to crisis situations which command international media attention, the Irish Presidency will seek to ensure a clear and continued focus on the world's forgotten, complex and protracted emergencies.

We will seek to step up efforts to improve the effectiveness and coherence of the EU's humanitarian assistance. This will involve coordination and information sharing; operational discussions; interaction with relevant external humanitarian actors; and a coordinated response, where appropriate, to other key humanitarian decision-making fora.

We will support the ongoing efforts at UN level under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Valerie Amos, to strengthen and reform the overall international humanitarian relief effort through the Transformative Agenda.

Linking Relief, Recovery and Development

A second major priority of the Irish Presidency will be to promote better linkages between humanitarian relief, recovery and longer-term development. I know that this is also an area of work which has long been championed by members of this committee.

The chronic nature of poverty and vulnerability, and the increasing frequency and severity of natural and man-made disasters in recent years, points to the need to ensure a coherent, joined-up approach on the part of both humanitarian and development actors.

We believe that it is essential to forge stronger links between the EU's development and humanitarian policies and programmes, notably through an increased focus on building the resilience of vulnerable individuals, families, communities, nations and regions.

An important element will be actions to anticipate, prevent, and prepare for disasters that will enhance the protection of individuals and their communities from the effects of natural and man-made disasters, and will improve the resilience of countries and regions to the increasing threats of such events.

Much work has already taken place on resilience, including the establishment last year of the AGIR initiative to address, in a durable and sustainable manner, the recurrent food crises in the Sahel.

Similarly, the SHARE initiative for the Horn of Africa aims to improve the link between humanitarian and development actions, and ensure long-term engagement to enhance resilience in that region.

Ireland will draw on lessons learned from these initiatives, as well as from other lessons from the field, to explore the most effective practical application of linking relief, recovery and development, and to showcase examples of best practice in the field. We would hope that our Presidency will develop Council Conclusions which will offer tangible political expression to the EU's efforts to promote resilience, as well as offering guidance for changes that may be needed in order to put this into effect.

EU Aid Volunteers Initiative

A third major dossier for our Presidency will, I know, be of particular interest to the European Parliament. During the course of our Presidency, we will seek to make progress on the legislative proposal to establish the EU Aid Volunteers initiative.

We believe that this initiative will provide an invaluable opportunity for enhanced citizen participation in the overall EU humanitarian effort. A well functioning, well trained Corps of professional Humanitarian Aid Volunteers should be seen as a concrete expression of the EU's solidarity with those in need.

We greatly look forward to working with the European Parliament, and in particular with Madame Michèle Striffler (Standing Rapporteur for this proposal) and her Shadow Rapporteurs, in order to facilitate discussions between the Council, Commission and European Parliament on this important initiative.

Ireland considers this legislation to be a key priority within the sphere of humanitarian aid, and we will do our utmost to work closely with the Parliament, and to ensure that members are fully informed on progress. We count on your support in successfully advancing the establishment of a demand-driven EU Aid Volunteers initiative which adds value to the overall EU humanitarian effort, is cost effective, and which responds to humanitarian need.

A principled approach to humanitarian action

Finally, Ireland will champion the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. We will work to be proactive and principled, but also flexible and pragmatic, in our engagement with other actors so as to ensure that the voice of the EU, its Member States, and wider humanitarian community is heard.

We very much recognise the importance of protecting the so-called ‘humanitarian space’ and know from experience that those agencies and actors which are perceived as impartial to a conflict are invariably best placed to deliver aid to those who need it most.

Emergency humanitarian assistance is not and must not be considered to form part of the crisis management toolbox; the provision of humanitarian assistance must continue to be based on needs alone.

The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid provides a robust set of humanitarian commitments which enshrine these fundamental principles and which are intended to ensure an appropriate, principled and effective aid response by donors across the European Union.

Under our Presidency, Ireland will promote the operational implementation of these fundamental principles guiding our work through the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.

Crisis situations

Before turning to any questions you may have, as an example of the type of operational activity we are likely to be supporting over the next six months, I would like to briefly touch upon three current crises situations; namely, Mali, Syria and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Mali

Mali has been one of the countries worst affected by the wider humanitarian crisis in the Sahel. The coup d’état in March 2012 and subsequent security crisis in the northern part of the country only served to worsen an already dire situation. In 2012 aid agencies reported that almost half a million Malians were internally displaced or had sought refuge in neighbouring countries and that five million people in Mali faced food crisis, drought and insecurity.

Following the French military intervention at the request of the Bamako authorities the situation in Mali was discussed in detail at an extraordinary meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council, in Brussels on 17 January. At this meeting the EU expressed its preparedness to step up support to the efforts being made by humanitarian organisations to assist the people in need in Mali and in neighbouring countries.

The precise impact of recent developments on the humanitarian situation are unclear but population displacements have been reported by humanitarian agencies on the ground, adding to the first wave of displacements from the region that started in April 2012.

The EU has taken a proactive role in responding to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Mali. Commissioner Georgieva visited Bamako on 8 December and emphasized the necessity to increase humanitarian capacity and coordination mechanisms to address persistent needs. Following her visit the Commission increased its humanitarian response to the crisis in Mali by €20 which brought the EU's humanitarian support to Mali in 2012 to €101 million.

This funding will help to provide food assistance, water and sanitation, shelter, health and protection to those affected by the conflict both within Mali, north and south, and to refugees in neighbouring countries.

The Irish Presidency will continue to encourage Member States to support the growing needs of the Malian population with a particular focus on displaced populations. It is also important that the EU should call on all parties to the conflict to respect the safety of civilians, to leave medical and educational facilities untouched, and not to impede the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable populations. We call on all parties to respect and uphold International Humanitarian Law.

Syria

We are all familiar with the appalling suffering that has been visited on the Syrian people since the uprising began in March 2011. However, I think the facts bear repeating:

An estimated 60,000 people have been killed;

An estimated 2.5 million people inside Syria require immediate humanitarian assistance;

Approximately 1.2 million people inside Syria have been internally displaced;

Registered refugees from Syria in the region now exceed half a million, with many more awaiting registration.

In August last year, when the scale of the crisis was already staggering but not yet at its current level, I visited Jordan, where I witnessed firsthand the huge strain that accommodating such a significant refugee population is placing on host countries, both in relation to refugee camps and in host communities. In this context, the commendable and extensive efforts of Syria's neighbours to welcome refugees and respond proactively and generously to their needs cannot be overstated.

It is clear, however, that the situation – both for the population within Syria and for host countries – has long been untenable and is reaching breaking point.

It is essential therefore that the EU, as a leader within the international community, continues to strive to respond to the overwhelming humanitarian needs of the populations affected by the conflict, whilst working simultaneously to support efforts to find a sustainable political solution.

The EU has responded generously to the crisis in terms of financial assistance – having allocated over 422 million Euros in donations and in-kind assistance since the start of the unrest.

We have consistently called upon all parties to facilitate humanitarian access and aid delivery to the people in need, to ensure the neutrality of humanitarian aid and to abide by International Humanitarian Law.

The EU has also reiterated its demand for the specific protection provided to medical personnel and facilities and for the safe passage and protection of civilians, especially of women and children who have been displaced as a result of the violence.

During our presidency, we aim to ensure that the EU will continue to address the situation in Syria as a matter of priority. The EU must further enhance our response to urgent needs, focusing on lifesaving humanitarian operations and, to the greatest extent possible, increase our efforts to meet urgent humanitarian needs through increased humanitarian contributions, in coordination with the UN and in line with humanitarian principles.

Democratic Republic of Congo

I would also like to draw your attention to the situation in the DRC which, while currently the focus of some media attention in the aftermath of the M23 rebel group incursion into Goma, remains one of the world's most enduring and complex, yet all too often forgotten, humanitarian crises.

DRC has seen more than 5 million people die since 1998, with the conflict being arguably the world's most deadly crisis since the Second World War.

At the start of 2012, there were an estimated 1.6 million internally displaced persons in DRC; following the recent upsurge in violence, it is now estimated that 2.4 million persons are displaced, with almost half a million additional refugees in neighbouring countries.

The complexity of the crisis in DRC requires both immediate assistance strategies to provide life saving humanitarian assistance and longer term strategies aimed at building lasting capacity and increasing the ability of communities to withstand future shocks.

Equally, as acknowledged in the Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions of 10 December, in order to put an end to the ongoing suffering of the Congolese people, it is vital that we endeavour to find a lasting solution which addresses the underlying causes of this conflict. We must remain committed to this and other forgotten crises.

In closing, I would like to again underline Ireland's commitment to progressing the humanitarian assistance agenda, and our eagerness to work closely with the European Parliament, as well as other Institutions, in order to achieve the priorities I have outlined today.

I remain at your disposal for any questions you may have and I thank you for your kind attention.
