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COHAFA 51
DEVGEN 123
ALIM 8
ONU 62
FAO 20
COAFR 106
MAMA 95
MOG 57
COEST 141
COASI 88
PROCIV 40
RELEX 609

OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From: General Secretariat of the Council

To: Delegations

Subject: Outcome of proceedings of the Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and
Food Aid held on 14-15 May 2019

Delegations will find attached the outcome of proceedings of the Working Party on Humanitarian
Aid and Food Aid held on 14-15 May 2019.

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted as set out in CM 2678/19 REV 1.

2. Report on the Evaluation of the Regulation (EU) 2016/369 on the provision of emergency support within the Union

The Commission made a presentation on the report, recalling the purpose and added value of the Emergency Support Instrument (ESI), the conditions for activation, and the complementarity with other EU instruments. The evaluation of the activation for response in Greece had shown that the ESI was relevant, efficient and effective. Things to improve were mostly linked to this specific activation rather than to structural issues about the instrument itself. The Commission closed their presentation by mentioning the three options on the future of the ESI set out in the report, and expressed their preference for it to remain in place for future activation in the event of natural or man-made disasters as necessary. The Presidency explained that any decision on the future of the ESI would not be taken by COHAFa but via the relevant Council preparatory body.

3. Education in Emergencies

The Commission presented their recent Staff Working Document (SWD) on Education in Emergencies and recalled the key aspects of the related Commission communication. The presentation outlined the Commission's detailed objectives with regard to Education in Emergencies and provided an outlook on the next steps in implementing the SWD.

4. WFP Executive Board Annual Session (Rome, 10-14 June)

COHAFa held a discussion on the agenda items of the upcoming WFP Executive Board meetings on which there should be statements on behalf of the EU and its Member States. Delegations were invited to send comments after the meeting. The Presidency explained that the selection was to be agreed by silence procedure.

5. International Conference on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Crises (Oslo, 23-24 May)

The Commission briefed Member States about this international conference and presented the draft policy and political commitments which they would like to make at Oslo on behalf of the EU. The Commission stressed that the suggested language for all commitments had been taken from existing agreed documents endorsed by the Council and/or the Member States, and said they would not make any financial commitments at Oslo. COHAFA was invited to endorse the final version of the proposed commitments by silence procedure.

Delegations informed about their expected level of participation in the conference and the scope and type of financial pledges and political/policy commitments they may make at Oslo.

6. Sudan

The Commission briefed on recent developments regarding the humanitarian situation in Sudan. UN agencies, NGOs and INGOs were facing mounting challenges to respond to humanitarian needs due to increasing instability and insecurity, lootings and attacks against compounds and humanitarian staff, and growing administrative hurdles. The humanitarian situation was set to deteriorate, with a hunger gap and rising food insecurity expected during the upcoming lean season. In addition, threats against civilians were worsening in view of the timetable for the UNAMID withdrawal, and there were also new displacements in some parts of Darfur. The current transition in the political process presented a window of opportunity for joint-up humanitarian advocacy to create an enabling environment for humanitarian organisations, and an historic opportunity to ask a future transition government to lift measures hampering the response and principled assistance. The Presidency invited delegations to confirm in writing that the group should be working on common humanitarian advocacy messages.

7. Response to crises

a) Libya

The EEAS updated on the latest political developments since the beginning of the attack on Tripoli on 3 April. The Commission (ECHO) briefed on the humanitarian situation in the country, stressing their close coordination with the EEAS. The humanitarian response focused so far on the most pressing life-saving actions, but there is a need to prepare for the worst. All humanitarian partners were asking donors for sufficient funding, donor coordination, and advocacy with the parties to the conflict. As there had been attacks on medical workers, urging the parties to respect IHL was essential. NEAR updated on the desperate situation of refugees and migrants trapped in detention centres where hostilities are raging. UNHCR had managed to relocate some of them to other detention centres, but that was not a sustainable solution. Some 750 detainees had been evacuated out of Libya through the newly created UNHCR Gathering and Departure Facility in Tripoli, but this possibility depends upon the willingness of States to receive them and the Facility was soon to reach its maximum capacity of 1,000 people.

b) Gaza (*incl. an informal exchange of views with UNRWA – MaMa was invited to join COHAFSA for this item*)

As part of an informal exchange of views, Matthias Schmale, Director of UNRWA Operations in Gaza, briefed the groups on the ever more desperate situation of Palestinians living in the Gaza strip after 12 years of blockade. The mood had changed dramatically over the past year; people were increasingly turning to drugs, and health centres reported more cases of depression and suicide attempts. Mr Schmale urged Member States to address the issue of the blockade as Gazans would not have to depend on UN food handouts if they had jobs and ways to earn money. He thanked Member States and the Commission for their continued support and warned that the budget goals for 2019 had not yet been met. Delegations expressed their appreciation of UNRWA's work in Gaza and informed about their national funding for the agency.

c) Iran floods

The Commission briefed about the devastating floods affecting 28 out of 31 provinces in Iran, with 2 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, 500,000 people displaced and some areas still not fully accessible. There now was a risk of waterborne diseases spreading. The Commission also debriefed about the activation of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) and thanked AT, CZ, FR, IT and SK for their contributions. They also debriefed about a joint ECHO/EEAS mission to Tehran organised at the end of April to ease the delivery of in-kind assistance through the UCPM. The Romanian Presidency team from the Embassy in Tehran facilitated the coordination.

The EEAS complemented the briefing from a political perspective, stressing that with the US's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal, US sanctions that had been reinstated were squeezing the Iranian economy and limiting the Government's capacity to respond to the emergency situation. The country was feeling an increasing sense of isolation, but the EU assistance in response to the crisis was seen as a sign of solidarity despite political tensions.

d) DPRK

The EEAS briefed on the EU's policy vis-à-vis North Korea and the state of play regarding North Korea's relations with major global players. The EU was upholding pressure via sanctions and other means to achieve a complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearisation. UN sanctions were not meant to impede humanitarian assistance and the UN Panel of Experts on North Korea sanctions had issued recommendations on possibly streamlining the exemption process for humanitarian organisations, but it was not clear whether the 1718 UN Sanctions Committee was planning to take action on the recommendations. The Commission updated on the humanitarian crisis in the country, stressing that figures were to be taken with caution as they could not have been verified independently. Annual food production in DPRK was down 12% compared to last year, and the harvest had been the worst in ten years. It was estimated that 40% of people were in need of food assistance, a situation partly exacerbated by the sanctions and restrictions on food imports. Food insecurity was likely to increase further during the lean season from May until September.

8. AOB

a) Third International Conference on Safe Schools (Palma de Mallorca, 27-29 May)

The Spanish delegation provided an outlook on the objectives and programme of the conference. The main goal was to reach the widest possible endorsement, at the highest level possible, of the Safe Schools Declaration.

b) Ebola in the DRC

The UK delegation updated on the Ebola situation in the DRC, recalling it was the largest Ebola outbreak in the country's history. Some 1,680 people had been affected, of whom more than 1,100 had died, and the situation was likely to escalate further in the coming months. It was important to prioritise the response not only in the DRC but also in Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and South Sudan.

In the margins of the meeting, COHAFa also held an informal exchange of views with two representatives of Coordination SUD, the French national platform of solidarity NGOs: Thierry Benlahsen, Director of Operations with Solidarités international, and Catherine Giboin from Médecins du monde. They described the negative impact that current counterterrorism measures and sanctions have on the delivery of humanitarian assistance and identified measures the EU and Member States can take to improve the situation.

On Wednesday, 15 May 2019, COHAFa also joined the RELEX/Sanctions Working Party for their agenda item on the "Unintended impact of EU restrictive measures on the delivery of humanitarian aid".