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European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid – Action Plan

1. INTRODUCTION: IMPLEMENTING THE EUROPEAN CONSENSUS ON HUMANITARIAN AID

On 18 December 2007, the Presidents of the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament and the European Commission signed the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid¹, thereby committing the European Union to work closely together to apply the EU common vision of humanitarian aid outlined in the Consensus.

The European Consensus underlines the European Union's commitment to upholding and promoting the fundamental humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence and to advocating strongly for the respect of International Law, including International Humanitarian Law, Human Rights Law and Refugee Law. The objective of EU humanitarian aid is to provide a needs-based emergency response aimed at preserving life, preventing and alleviating human suffering and maintaining human dignity wherever the need arises if governments and local actors are overwhelmed, unable or unwilling to act.

In paragraph 100 of the European Consensus, the European Commission is tasked with presenting an action plan for practical measures to implement the Consensus. The Consensus commitments extend to the EU as a whole – both Member States and the European Commission. The action plan foreseen in paragraph 100 is annexed to this Commission Staff Working Paper. It has been the subject of close consultation with stakeholders as provided for in the Consensus.

The EU relies heavily on its implementing Partners – the UN, the Red Cross/Crescent Movement and the NGOs to deliver humanitarian aid. In the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, the EU explicitly underlined the importance of this plurality of Partners. This partnership approach is fundamental to the implementation of the commitments contained in the Consensus, extending to the actions outlined in the present Action Plan.

2. ENHANCING AID EFFECTIVENESS: THE EU ACTING TOGETHER AND IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OTHERS

2.1. Structure of the Action Plan

The purpose of this Action Plan is to set out a series of practical actions for the European Union's humanitarian donors that taken together form the EU's substantive agenda for implementing a more closely co-ordinated approach. The overall aim is to ensure that the European Union maximises the effectiveness of its contribution to the collective international humanitarian response.

A number of directly-applicable commitments are contained in the European Consensus statement itself, notably commitments relating to the humanitarian principles, 'Responsibility to protect' and on the use of civil protection resources and military assets in response to humanitarian situations. Those important commitments

¹ OJ C 25 of 30 January 2008, p.1

are considered self-standing arising directly from the Consensus declaration, and therefore have not been repeated in the Action Plan.

This Action Plan should therefore be read as a practical complement to the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid – which remains the basic reference text at EU level. Cross-referencing between actions and the related paragraphs in the Consensus has been included for ease of use.

In order to facilitate implementation of the action plan, related actions have been grouped together into six 'action areas':

- area one: advocacy, promotion of humanitarian principles and international law;
- area two: implementing quality aid approaches;
- area three: reinforcing capacities to respond;
- area four: strengthening partnership;
- area five: enhancing coherence and coordination;
- area six: the aid continuum.

2.2. Prioritisation and phasing of actions

The initial period of implementation of the Action Plan is foreseen as five years from second-half 2008 onwards. This Action Plan builds on current initiatives and areas of cooperation already underway, for example in context of Good Humanitarian Donorship, donor fora at an international level or bilateral contacts. Much of the expertise for areas contained in the action plan rests with the Partner organisations.

A challenge for the EU is to ensure effective implementation of these actions based on current resources and as such indicative timing has been included in order to allow for phasing of actions over the full period of the action plan. The bulk of actions should be underway by 2009. A number of areas may take longer to put in motion, but this does not necessarily imply that they have a lower priority.

In presenting the Action Plan, the European Commission services have sought to identify areas where EU actions will clearly add-value to current practice. Some measures are matters of detailed practical cooperation, others are rather more strategic. A red-thread running throughout the Action Plan is the aim of underpinning international efforts to ensure an adequate overall humanitarian response (including reforms of the humanitarian system).

Areas of specific political priority, high-importance for operational performance, or areas that appear to require specific additional momentum from EU donors working together, have been highlighted as priority actions. This should not be seen as detracting from the EU's commitment also to implement the additional actions.

2.3. Who will implement?

Both the Member States and the European Commission have endorsed the commitments contained in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.

The EU as a whole provided 49.6% of total official humanitarian aid in 2006. Its contribution is made up of the Community response (humanitarian aid provided by the Commission's Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid) and the provision of bilateral humanitarian aid directly by Member States. There is currently considerable variation in terms of size of aid contributions, capacity and experience in implementation of humanitarian aid within the EU. One of the aspirations of the European Consensus is to ensure that the EU as a whole is able to benefit from sharing its collective donor and operational experience.

The majority of actions identified in the Action Plan are to be pursued by the Commission and the Member states acting together. These actions are identified for practical purposes in the Action Plan as "EU".

Thus, "EU" is taken to mean:

either,

i) the whole of the EU;

or, in some cases where appropriate, depending on the nature of the commitment,

ii) a variable group of EU donors, including the European Commission, who have a particular interest or experience in a given area.

This should be defined together pragmatically, based on transparency and inclusiveness, whilst recognising resource constraints.

In a more limited number of cases, the Commission has indicated priorities or given an undertaking for specific actions applicable primarily or solely to the European Community's humanitarian aid contribution or operations. These have been identified in the annexed Action Plan as "EC" (standing for "European Community").

The actions contained in the Action Plan are defined specifically from the perspective of EU humanitarian aid donors, however, there is an underlying assumption that implementation of the majority of actions should be pursued in close collaboration with the humanitarian Partners and other stakeholders.

In implementing the European Consensus, the EU should pursue scope for a more coherent, consistent and comprehensive approach to humanitarian aid. So whilst the majority of actions contained in the annexed Action Plan are the primary responsibility of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid and of Member States' humanitarian aid departments (with the appropriate involvement of the European Parliament and Partners), some commitments - notably those under action areas one and six - clearly involve other parts of the EU Institutions and Member State governments, for example those with general responsibility for external relations.

3. ENSURING EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION THAT TRANSLATES INTO RESULTS

3.1. Monitoring progress, implementation and results

The Action Plan contains, for each action area an indication of the expected overall result. In addition indications of individual outputs per action are given. Taken together, with regular collective review of implementation of the Consensus and the Action Plan, this should allow the EU to assess its success in meeting its aim of improving the effectiveness of its humanitarian aid.

Ensuring effective implementation and monitoring progress in achieving practical results will be the common responsibility of the Commission (through its Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid) and the Member States, making use of the Council working party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid, and with appropriate input from the European Parliament and Partners. This builds upon the strong dialogue and contacts that have already been established on the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.

3.2. Reviewing the Action Plan

A formal mid-term review has been included in the Action Plan for 2010 to allow for an assessment of overall progress and for lessons to be drawn.

It is expected that the EU will make full use of its usual institutional channels and of dialogue with Partners to allow for an annual stock take and adjustment of priorities as appropriate.

4. CONCLUSION

As one of the world's largest humanitarian donors, the Commission - in particular working through its Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid (DG ECHO) - reiterates its commitment to fulfilling the commitments contained in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid and thus to implementing this action plan. Equally the Commission seeks to work hand in hand with the Member States to bring about a more effective overall EU contribution to humanitarian aid. To this end, the Council, and thus the Member States, are invited also to endorse the annexed Action Plan and to engage actively in its implementation.
