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Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid - ECHO

Operational Strategy 2010

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1. GENERAL CONTEXT AND OUTLOOK FOR 2010

This operational strategy is presented in a global humanitarian context that is fundamentally unchanged, if not worsening. The problems that are raised time and again in the description of specific country situations in section 3 of this strategy are similar all over the world: they include a tightening of the humanitarian space by governments and non-government actors who disregard even the most basic protection afforded under International Humanitarian Law (IHL); brutal methods of warfare, targeting civilians and frequently using sexual violence as a weapon of war; attacks, expulsions and killings of humanitarian aid workers; the increasing humanitarian impact of climate change; and local communities and humanitarian actors that are ill prepared to cope with this impact.

Increasing needs are the result of a combination of factors: a larger number of **refugees and displaced persons** due to conflicts, the increase in natural disasters due to climate change and the impact of the economic crisis driving more people into a state of distress. More than one billion people are currently malnourished. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, there were "*some 42 million forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2008. This includes 15.2 million refugees, 827,000 asylum-seekers (pending cases) and 26 million internally displaced persons (IDPs).*"¹ While these levels appear stable when compared to 2007, the considerable recent displacements in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Somalia must also be added².

A large number of displaced populations around the world find themselves in that situation as a result of **natural disasters**. There has been a spectacular long-term increase in such disasters, which rose from about 200/250 per year in the period 1987-1997 to about 450 annually from between 2000 and 2007. Most of this rise is due to weather-related events. For the humanitarian community, this means that disaster risk reduction efforts should be reinforced. We must arrive at a sustainable balance between relatively more cost-efficient preparatory efforts and relatively more expensive emergency operations. The Copenhagen climate change conference will represent a milestone in this debate. In particular, the possible creation of a mechanism allowing concerned countries to make more significant investments in disaster risk reduction is of significant interest to the humanitarian community.

In addition, in country after country mentioned in section 3 **access to beneficiaries** is becoming increasingly limited. Delivering humanitarian aid is becoming more and more difficult and dangerous, either because of governments imposing restrictions (e.g.: Sri Lanka, Burma/Myanmar) or because of ongoing conflict and/or targeting of humanitarian workers (e.g. Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Colombia). Recent statistics speak for themselves: in 2008, a record 260 aid workers were victims of killings, injuries or kidnappings in the course of duty. In the same year, with 122 aid workers killed, the fatality rate for international humanitarian aid workers was higher than that for international peace-keeping troops³. In addition to the safety of personnel, humanitarian donors must confront the fact that some governments go to the extreme of expropriating or "borrowing" funds and property financed

¹ See: UNHCR, 2008 Global Trends: Refugees, Asylum-seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons, p.2. (June 2009)

² See http://africaninstitute.co.uk/Refugee_Week_2009.html

³ A. Stoddard, A. Harmer, V. Di Domenico: *Providing aid in insecure environments: 2009 Update, Trends in violence against aid workers and the operational response*. HPG Policy Brief 34, Humanitarian Policy Group (April 2009)

by donors and/or expelling the humanitarian aid organizations once they have been stripped of their assets.

In this bleak context - and with increasing donor country budget deficits making it less likely that current humanitarian budgets will be sustained in 2010 and beyond - the Commission's Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid (DG ECHO) will respond in two main ways: first, by addressing the main challenges horizontally, devising policies that make aid more effective and bringing problems to the attention of decision-makers and the general public; and second, through systematic, equitable and consistent programming of available funds.

2. HORIZONTAL PRIORITIES

In the implementation of its operational priorities, DG ECHO will be paying particular attention to a number of issues. On the one hand these horizontal priorities are defined by experience gained in the field in specific countries; on the other hand, they reflect the main political commitments made by the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament in the 2007 **European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid**. Therefore, these priorities are included in the overall programming (see section 3.1) as well as in tentative planning for individual countries and regions (see sections 3.2 to 3.5).

While the Commission and Member States have worked to implement the commitments made in the Consensus and at the 2008 Brussels Conference on **International Humanitarian Law** (IHL), the situation on the ground is worsening. The list of countries whose governments simply do not abide by the law is getting longer. A particularly gruesome aspect of IHL violations is the fact that sexual violence is used as a weapon of war – most prominently in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). DG ECHO is working on a systematic approach to integrate all gender issues into its humanitarian operations. In the meantime, humanitarian aid operations in the countries concerned will systematically integrate this aspect in their response strategies.

As far as IHL is concerned, advocacy for the protection of the **humanitarian space** must continue unabated. Numerous governments continue to disregard the commitments made in the Geneva Conventions. Such problems cannot be dealt with at the technical level alone and they require continued political impetus if the Commission and the EU are to make progress in what is, admittedly, a hugely challenging area.

While the lion's share of the Commission's humanitarian aid budget will once again be spent on aid in complex emergencies, initiatives are needed in order to cope with the humanitarian impact of **climate change**. The international community cannot intervene in most natural disaster zones, because these disasters have become too numerous. The Commission is therefore investing increasing resources in **disaster-risk reduction** (DRR) activities with the aim of strengthening the coping capacities at all levels in disaster-prone regions. It is in the wider context of the EU policy and strategy in this field⁴ as well as of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) that DG ECHO is developing a specific strategic and coherent framework aimed at helping communities and relevant institutions to prepare for and reduce the impact of natural disasters. This intention to have a clearer DRR focus in its operations is reflected in the overall spending levels planned for 2010 (cf. section 3.1. below).

⁴ In particular with a view to the EU Strategy supporting Disaster Risk Reduction in Developing Countries (see: COM/2009/0084)

The European Union's **military** involvement in a number of conflict zones has made it apparent that the humanitarian community must seek closer dialogue with military actors. The Consensus's aim of creating the basis for a clearer operational understanding of the respective roles of humanitarian and military actors must therefore be pursued in order to avoid a blurring of the lines and the identities of these different actors. Consequently, the Commission will continue its dialogue with military actors and political decision-makers, not only during the planning phase of specific missions, but also at a more general level.

In 2010, as part of its efforts to improve the **response capacity** of the humanitarian community, the Commission will focus on improving human and technical resources, the cluster roll-out, needs assessment and emergency preparedness, local capacity building and logistics. At the same time, in numerous country operations (e.g. Sudan/Darfur, DRC) capacity building for partners and local communities is being mainstreamed. Both the Commission's policies and operations will reflect its continued commitment to a strong international humanitarian aid system, a range of implementing partners and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (OCHA) central coordinating role.

Another major subject area of the European Consensus is the challenge of managing situations of transition more effectively, i.e. linking humanitarian aid and development cooperation (**LRRD**) so that humanitarian aid can be based on concrete exit strategies without leaving a vacuum. The Commission is working on steps to further strengthen this approach, for instance, through common situation and intervention analyses undertaken by humanitarian and development actors. In keeping with its mandate, DG ECHO will continue to analyse exit opportunities in an LRRD framework. In this context, an exit strategy is in place for Burundi and Tanzania and no new emergency operations are planned in 2010 in Chechnya and Georgia.

In the field of **humanitarian food aid**, the present strategy has two overarching priorities: first, to efficiently and effectively manage a food assistance budget that will continue to be stretched in the near to medium term; and second, to advance various policy making initiatives in order to make food aid as effective as possible. DG ECHO will finalise and implement a humanitarian food assistance policy, contribute to the EC's evolving policy debate on nutrition and raise the profile of nutrition in the EC's external aid activities. The Commission will also coordinate negotiations for the reform of the **Food Aid Convention**. The main challenge is to turn this international treaty into a modern and meaningful convention that has a stronger humanitarian focus and supports an appropriate range of food assistance responses.

Other commitments of the Consensus will continue to require attention in 2010. **Sectoral issues** such as the creation of a system to improve the monitoring of costs for specific results in humanitarian assistance, the abovementioned attention to gender issues and an improvement in the global assessment of humanitarian needs are just some examples of work to be pursued in 2010. Overall, implementation of the Consensus is on time and will be subject to a thorough joint review with Member States in 2010.

3. OPERATIONAL PRIORITIES

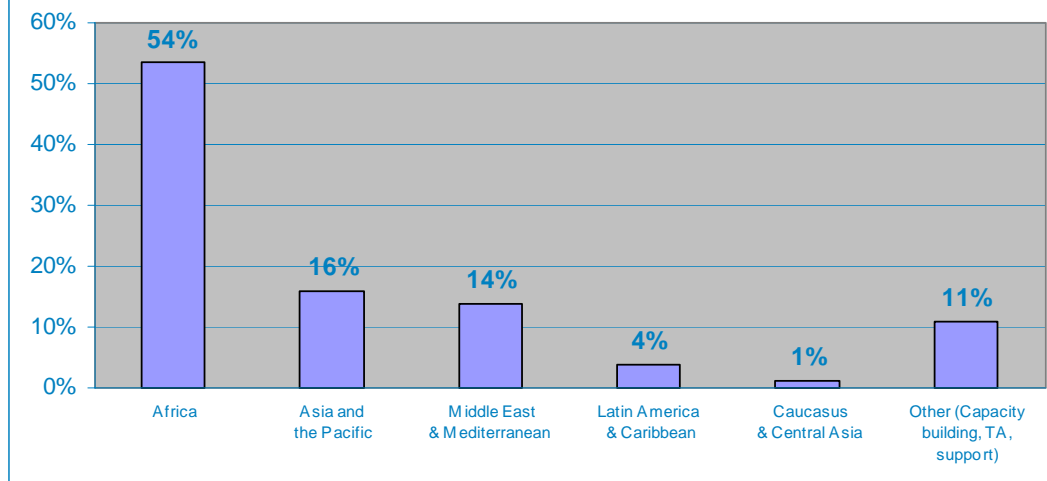
3.1. Priorities reflected in the budget allocation

Concerning its humanitarian response **interventions in third countries**, the Commission is committed to delivering aid in the areas of greatest **humanitarian need**. In doing so, a balance needs to be struck between interventions in existing long-term crises on the one hand and responses to new disasters on the other hand. Therefore, the Commission's allocation methodology must achieve two things: first, it must accurately assess the areas of greatest need in order to provide an appropriate allocation of funds; and second, it must set aside an unprogrammed reserve to cope with new disasters. Once these needs have been assessed at a global level, other factors such as the exact nature of the needs, access to beneficiaries and absorption capacity have to be analysed to arrive at the appropriate allocation.

In order to satisfy these criteria, the Commission favours a two-pronged approach. First, a **Global Needs Assessment** (GNA) is conducted centrally. This assessment compares 139 developing countries on the basis of a data set that defines their vulnerability. This vulnerability indicator is then combined with a crisis indicator to assess which countries are or have recently been affected by disasters. Simultaneously, geographical units and field-based experts evaluate the situation in each of the countries and regions concerned. These evaluations provide precise insights into the nature of needs. This process also generates information about pockets of localised needs within a country that are not captured by GNA's national indicators. Since field-based evaluations also identify crises that are receiving insufficient international attention, they are the key component in the **Forgotten Crisis Assessment** (FCA). Other factors include low media coverage, a lack of donor interest and weak political commitments to resolving the crisis. Both the GNA and the FCA are thus invaluable tools in determining impartially and independently where Commission aid is most likely to be necessary, introducing equity and consistency in the Commission's humanitarian aid. However, it is important to emphasize that the final commitment decided by the Commission in a specific crisis will also be determined by other donors' commitments, access to beneficiaries and absorption capacity defined by our partners' ability to work in specific country situations.

As indicated in the regional allocation in the graph below, the bulk of the 2010 budget of €800.5 million will be spent in **sub-Saharan Africa**. The Commission has identified **39 countries or territories** that are experiencing at least one crisis. Of these, 16 are very vulnerable, and 13 of those are in sub-Saharan Africa. 58% of the geographical budget is allocated to the 16 most vulnerable countries.

1.B. Budget 2010 Planned allocation by region

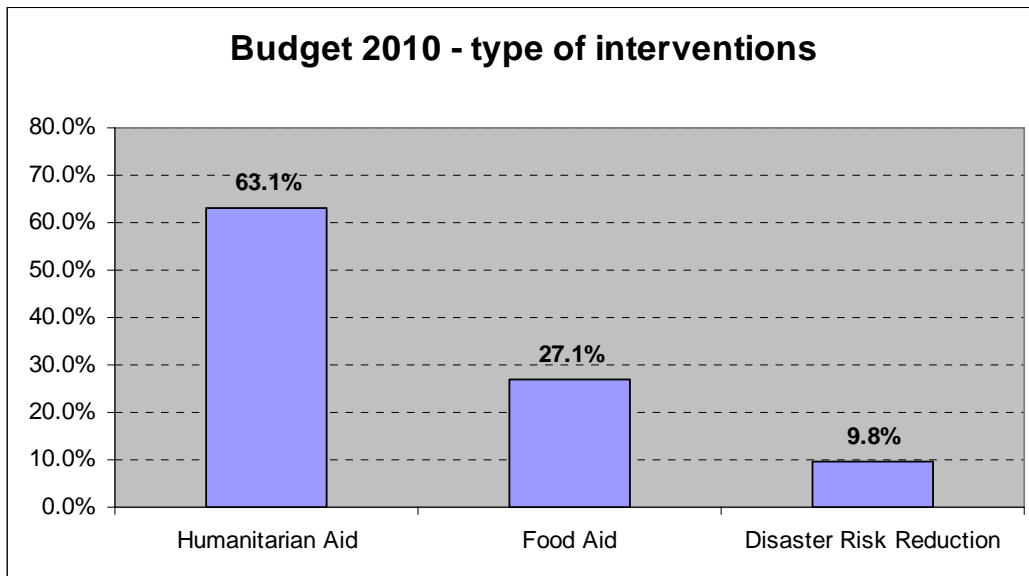


In the graph above, the percentage of the planned allocation by region is calculated against the share of the budget that has been planned.

It must be noted that 21% of the budget remains unallocated at this stage in order to address changing priorities and new emerging needs not foreseen at the time of programming. In the event of a major new disaster in 2010, the Commission can additionally request the budgetary authority to release funds from the Commission's Emergency Aid Reserve over and above the original humanitarian aid budget.

Approximately 17% of the geographical budget allocation is dedicated to **12 “forgotten crisis”** situations - in other words five more than the previous year. They concern the Lao Hmong minority in Thailand; the Rohingya refugees and the Chittagong Hill Tracts crisis in Bangladesh; the inter-ethnic conflict in Burma/Myanmar and the related Burmese refugee situation in Thailand; the populations affected by the internal armed conflict in Colombia, by the conflict in the north of Yemen as well as the refugees from the Horn of Africa; the Sahrawi refugees in Algeria and the populations affected by regional conflicts in India (Kashmir, north-east India, Naxalite affected regions). The four newly identified crises concern the populations affected by the internal armed conflict in Central African Republic, the Somali refugee crisis in Kenya, the Mindanao crisis in the Philippines and the Bhutanese refugees in Nepal. Finally, one crisis must be considered as having been forgotten, even if the FCA methodology is not fully applicable in this case: namely the crisis in the Sahel region (mainly Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger), which is suffering from a continuing series of external shocks (poor rains, political instability, high food prices, epidemics etc) aggravating an already fragile situation but not attracting the attention of the media.

The chart below illustrates budget programming by **type of interventions**. Particular attention will be paid to **disaster risk reduction** activities. DG ECHO has numerous means at its disposal to finance such activities. Its long-standing disaster preparedness programme (DIPECHO) is implemented in most disaster prone regions of the world.



Existing projects cover Central Asia, South Asia, South America and the Caribbean and new DIPECHO Action Plans are scheduled for 2010 in Southern Africa and the Indian Ocean, South East Asia and Central America. Mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction is being mainstreamed in a number of humanitarian projects, for instance, in DRC, Chad or Haiti. Specific projects are being financed in the Horn of Africa and in West Africa (for details, see the corresponding sections below). Through the grant facility and its capacity building programme for international organizations, DG ECHO can also finance the horizontal disaster risk reduction activities of its partners. Overall, in 2010 a total investment of more than €75 million is earmarked for disaster risk reduction.

The need for **Humanitarian Food Assistance** continues to increase. Since the price explosion in 2008, international food prices have followed a more modest path. However, it is still not possible to fully address the increased needs: food prices at the point of delivery in most food insecure countries remain high, which in turn keeps the cost of humanitarian food operations high and increases the number of vulnerable persons. Increased aid needs are also compounded by implementation difficulties in some countries, such as Sudan, Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka. Therefore, food assistance in 2010 will concentrate resources on the most immediate life-saving interventions, in order to respond to well-defined life-threatening risks and to support the most appropriate and effective combination of response options and tools.

3.2. Africa

3.2.1. Sudan and Chad

Sudan

Throughout the country, the efforts deployed to link humanitarian aid to Commission development programmes have been compromised by the decision not to ratify the revised Cotonou Agreement. The indictment of President Bashir by the International Criminal Court had added another element of complexity.

Sudan is expected to remain the country in which the Commission has the largest humanitarian intervention. This is commensurate with the extent of needs (more than 6 million affected persons), the existence of three interdependent but distinct simultaneous crises and the limitations imposed on the humanitarian space, all of which drive up costs. In

Darfur independent and neutral aid delivery to remote, conflict-affected areas has been severely hampered by the expulsion of several NGOs in March 2009 and by administrative obstacles and heightened insecurity. Access limitations, the impact on the quality of operations and their costs in particular, are undermining protection activities and displacement monitoring. The East and transitional areas have also been severely affected by the expulsion while the South remains an emergency context with indicators well beyond the humanitarian thresholds.

In view of the extent and complexity of the Sudan crisis, DG ECHO will pursue a threefold strategy. The bulk of funding in 2010 will be dedicated to addressing life-saving needs of several millions of displaced people, refugees, returnees, local communities and nomads. In Darfur, assistance should be maintained in the camps and settlements (also to prevent forced returns), in deprived rural areas to prevent new displacements, and in conflict areas. Priority intervention areas are access to basic services and food assistance. In the South and transitional areas priority will be given to those areas where returnees and communities are facing extreme hardship, which is compounded by disasters and displacement. Support for the reintegration of returnees will also be pursued. DG ECHO will promote preparedness and strengthen the response capacity of both aid providers and the communities, for instance through water mitigation and activities that increase resilience to droughts. Last but not least, the support to partners in their attempt to maintain a safe and principled implementation of operations will continue through the funding of common services, such as air transport, a commitment to effective coordination, and the reinforcement of an advocacy and communication strategy aimed at defending the humanitarian space and principles.

Chad

Access to beneficiaries has been particularly problematic in 2009 due to difficulties in ensuring a full deployment of MINURCAT (UN mission in Central African Republic and Chad), attacks by the armed opposition and acts of banditism. The situation in Eastern Chad and in Darfur makes a return of Sudanese refugees very unlikely. In the southern part of the country, the arrival of new Central African refugees since the beginning of 2009 has made the situation even worse. There is an increased food insecurity risk for Chad, particularly in the East and the Centre of the country. The risk of floods and epidemics remains high.

In response to this situation, the Commission's humanitarian aid strategy will centre on: first, maintaining a response that respects beneficiaries' strategies to reduce dependence on humanitarian aid, focused on the health sector, and water and sanitation; second, stepping up of LRRD dynamics in train since 2008 regarding food security in the South and, as circumstances allow, the promotion of food security approaches as a substitute for in-kind food assistance; third, reinforcing the response capacities of a population that is structurally very vulnerable to the risk of epidemics and floods as well as the impact of climate on food security (this requires capacity strengthening of some Commission partners at national level); and fourth, preserving the humanitarian space vis-à-vis actors such as MINURCAT or the Chadian Government with a focus on humanitarian (air transport) logistics, coordination and advocacy.

3.2.2. Central Africa

Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Despite the gradual return of peace to the rest of the country, the humanitarian situation in the East has worsened in 2009. Sexual violence is a very disturbing and widespread phenomenon.

With 1.5 million displaced people, a significant fall in the level of the harvest due to access problems and prevailing insecurity, the humanitarian situation remains precarious. Water and sanitation problems are additional challenges standing in the way of restoring relative stability. The reintegration of refugees coming from Tanzania and Zambia creates additional problems.

In order to tackle this situation, DG ECHO will support food security programmes in order to provide subsistence and help re-establish security combined with support for returning refugees. These activities which represent the bulk of DG ECHO financing, will be closely coordinated with development cooperation instruments, particularly in the areas of reintegration, rehabilitation, health and food security. Where circumstances allow this approach should enable intervention by other donors in the spirit of LRRD. Commission financing will also be used to increase the quality and speed of aid by reinforcing partners' capacities. DG ECHO is also determining to increase its presence in the prevention of sexual violence and the treatment of victims by integrating these aspects into the majority of projects which form part of the Commission's global strategy to address this problem. Finally, the Commission will continue to defend the humanitarian space and promote respect for humanitarian principles through advocacy, coordination and active support for humanitarian logistics, mostly through ECHO Flight.

ECHO Flight

ECHO Flight operations allow the Commission to continue to contribute to the implementation of humanitarian projects in remote regions, be it in DRC, Kenya or other possible areas of operation. This activity increases humanitarian access for humanitarian actors and provides an efficient, reliable and safe service, which is also used in the framework of post-crisis projects. The service will continue to coordinate closely with other humanitarian aid services and to avoid any competition with viable commercial airlines.

Central African Republic (CAR)

The Central African Republic has witnessed increased insecurity in 2009, which has restricted the humanitarian space and access to populations and led to a deterioration of the humanitarian situation. In 2010, DG ECHO will respond both to existing needs and to new emergencies, contributing to the humanitarian effort in two main areas: first, the provision of multisectoral humanitarian assistance, with a particular focus on water and sanitation and nutrition; and, second, support for the protection of vulnerable civilians, particularly women and children, and enhanced access to populations, by encouraging the presence of humanitarian actors in the most critical areas, supporting humanitarian logistics services and promoting the need for efficient humanitarian coordination. At the same time, particular attention will be paid to LRRD in areas already earmarked for future reconstruction by development actors.

Burundi/Tanzania

DG ECHO's exit strategy from Burundi and Tanzania is based on two factors: refugee return and reintegration as well as a hand-over to development cooperation actors in the spirit of LRRD. Since the numbers returning were lower than predicted in 2009, two camps will remain in Tanzania and three in Burundi in 2010. Although a development dynamics is slowly taking root in Burundi, the country remains fragile both politically (presidential elections in 2010) and socio-economically (the return of hundreds of thousands of refugees and a precarious food security situation). Consequently, the main areas covered by LRRD to help

ensure coverage of essential needs will be food security, reintegration, health and nutrition, water and sanitation, education, protection and resettlement.

3.2.3. Horn of Africa

Ethiopia

The overall humanitarian situation remains challenging. The major concerns are still low food production due to consecutive rain failures, high food prices preventing the poorest households from having access to basic dietary requirements, and access limitations imposed by the Government, including lack of access to the Ogaden/Somali Regional State and restrictions on nutritional emergency response programmes. The Commission's humanitarian aid will continue to focus on food assistance, including food aid, nutrition and emergency food security interventions. Moreover, the efforts of the Government and development partners will be complemented by individual/local operations in the areas of health, including epidemics, and water and sanitation. Whenever feasible, opportunities for LRRD will continue to be explored and DRR will be mainstreamed in all operations, especially those implemented in arid and semi-arid lands.

Eritrea

Due to Government-imposed restrictions, resulting in a shrinking of the humanitarian space, a lack of reliable data and a reduction of the effective implementation capacity of partners, it has not been possible to commit the entirety of funds allocated in 2009 and it is no longer possible to address humanitarian needs in a professional manner. Therefore, at this stage, there are no plans for funding in 2010.

Kenya

Support for the thousands of Somali refugees will be continued. The population at Dadaab camp, where more than 320,000 people live in extremely precarious conditions, relies entirely on external assistance. Vital services are underfunded. DG ECHO will focus on providing safe water and sufficient sanitation facilities, helping to avoid interruptions in the food pipeline and improving the primary health services. In the arid parts of Kenya, where malnutrition rates are above WHO emergency standards, DG ECHO will support nutrition and livelihood activities, focusing on treatment and surveillance. Actions aimed at sustaining the early recovery from the severe drought in 2009 will also be funded in the sectors of food and food security, water and the health and management of livestock. Opportunities for LRRD, when possible, will continue to be pursued, especially in the sectors of food security and livelihood.

Somalia

Half of the population, that is an estimated 3.76 million people, are in need of humanitarian assistance, and these include more than 1.42 million IDPs. In addition, the overall situation in most parts of Somalia is deteriorating very rapidly as a result of undermined livelihoods, eroded coping strategies, high commodity prices, inflation, currency devaluation and persistent drought. Malnutrition rates are among the highest in the world. Humanitarian agencies, including DG ECHO's partners, continue to face challenges in providing relief to the population. Several aid agencies are prevented from undertaking accurate field assessments, ensuring proper monitoring and scaling up their activities to meet the growing needs. However, DG ECHO's partners have made considerable progress in increasing implementation capacity. As a rapid improvement in the situation is unlikely, DG ECHO will continue to focus on the core humanitarian needs of IDPs, host communities, extremely

marginalized communities and the chronically vulnerable. These will be addressed through food assistance, non-food items, health, water and sanitation. Livelihood support and cash programmes to the most vulnerable households will also be considered, as well as activities aimed at reducing malnutrition and providing water. Food aid will be considered only as an option of last resort. DG ECHO will continue to ensure complementarities and LRRD. Whenever feasible, opportunities for DRR will be explored.

Uganda

The Commission is gradually reducing its humanitarian funding as the return process of the IDPs continues in the Acholi region. A substantial reduction in the quantity of food aid needed is likely as the self-sufficiency of the returning populations improves. In the Karamoja region, however, food security remains precarious. DG ECHO will continue to support nutrition actions, interventions related to insecurity and livelihood support.

Regional Drought

In order to address the issue of drought in the Horn of Africa, the Commission will continue to support pilot humanitarian interventions in pursuit of two objectives: to improve the quality of the emergency response to drought, and to enhance the adaptive and coping strategies of local communities facing increasingly recurrent drought cycles, by reducing their dependency on external support. This approach, which includes a number of cross-border interventions, addresses the protracted humanitarian crisis in the Horn of Africa via a disaster risk reduction approach, including responding to the challenges posed by climate change to the arid and semi-arid lands of the Horn of Africa region. The strategy will be a response to the severe drought of 2009. In addition, regional advocacy actions will use and disseminate the lessons learned, as well as the good practices identified, thereby intensifying LRRD efforts. This approach has already begun to yield positive results. The integration of regional drought risk reduction actions into the institutional framework of disaster preparedness will be pursued, with the prospect of exiting once the institutional and development actors have fully incorporated the disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation approach into their support strategies targeting vulnerable populations.

3.2.4. Southern Africa and Indian Ocean

The 10 countries of Southern Africa have the highest prevalence rates of HIV and AIDS in the world. Since this factor increases the region's vulnerability to external shocks, it needs to be taken seriously into account in any assessment of emergency needs that is undertaken, including the link between HIV and AIDS and nutrition. Although the Commission is not planning a humanitarian intervention in the region, with the exception of Zimbabwe, the region nevertheless requires continued humanitarian monitoring.

Zimbabwe

2009 was marked by a massive cholera epidemic, the formation of a Government of National Unity, steps towards political re-engagement on the part of the EU (under Article 8 of Cotonou) and, for other donors, the dollarization and liberalization of the economy, as well as the best harvest in several years. The most serious dangers for the humanitarian situation are the likelihood of a second cholera epidemic and the fact that food is not available to those without access to foreign currency.

One challenge will be to make progress in the LRRD process and start an exit strategy for DG ECHO. This exit strategy appears to be more feasible in the food aid/food security sector

where, in addition to a second successful harvest, there are strong links with the longer-term programmes of other donors. The most problematic area for LRRD is likely to be the collapsed public health system, as there is currently little scope for longer-term development funding.

3.2.5. West Africa

The Sahel zone (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and the Sahelian northern regions of neighbouring countries)

DG ECHO's strategy for the Sahel zone continues to reduce mortality due to acute malnutrition among children under five, pregnant and lactating women and to advocate integrating the management of malnutrition within national primary healthcare systems, in close coordination with the development aid community. Actions will continue to be based on the previous three successful axes: first, *Improving the knowledge base*: encouraging improved methodology to measure malnutrition and livelihoods at household level, including the impact of climate change; second, *Support for innovative, appropriate and replicable pilot responses*: funding of projects with a focus on disaster risk reduction, strengthening coping mechanisms and the management of severe acute malnutrition; Third, *Relevant and effective advocacy toward populations at risk and policy makers to promote a sustainable and viable LRRD long-term approach*: This will focus on consolidating the considerable progress made in 2009 in this area and on LRRD issues as part of the mid-term reviews of the 10th EDF programmes in the Sahel zone in 2010.

It should be noted that continued very high food prices, erratic rains during this year's agricultural season and political instability have aggravated the risk of crisis for the most vulnerability population in the Sahel. Harvests are below average, household reserves are low, there is high indebtedness and coping mechanisms have been drastically weakened by a series of external shocks. Acute malnutrition rates remain well above internationally recognized emergency thresholds. Humanitarian access also represents a problem in certain areas of the Sahel.

Liberia

The Commission will continue its humanitarian commitment to Liberia in order to complete the transition from humanitarian aid to development. The LRRD process made progress in 2009 but continued humanitarian assistance is still required in the health and water and sanitation sectors until the 10th EDF funds programmed for this sector come on-stream in 2011.

Disaster preparedness and response in West Africa

All of West Africa is subject to recurrent epidemics and low magnitude natural disasters, such as flooding. Rapid response and emergency preparedness projects allow appropriate and measured responses, supplemented if necessary by emergency decisions. As part of its Disaster Risk Reduction strategy, DG ECHO will support actions to improve disaster preparedness in West Africa targeted in particular at flood preparedness and mitigation and the consequent health risks; it will also ensure a rapid response capacity by means of a further decision to respond to the regular epidemic emergencies that affect West Africa as a whole (cholera, yellow fever, meningitis, measles, etc.).

3.3. Middle East and Mediterranean

Occupied Palestinian Territory

The isolation and fragmentation of the West Bank (2.5 million inhabitants, including 754,000 refugees) continue to have a major impact on the Palestinian economy and on livelihoods, with the result that vast segments of a population are still increasingly dependent on humanitarian assistance. Persistent blockade and military operations in the Gaza Strip (1.5 million inhabitants, including 1 million refugees) have brought economic and social structures to the brink of collapse and the provision of essential services is at breaking point, with 95% of the population being dependent on aid. The region has been affected by drought for several years and response measures to deal with its consequences are planned.

DG ECHO's strategy in 2010 will mainstream the protection of civilians and target the most vulnerable segments of the population to satisfy their basic humanitarian needs. In this attempt, livelihood support (meaning food assistance and cash for work) will continue to be a priority for DG ECHO, amounting to as much as 56% of the aid provided. Attention will also be focused on water and sanitation, health and psychosocial support programmes. A strong coordination of all these activities will be supported.

In the West Bank, DG ECHO will primarily target populations in remote and isolated areas such as the seam zones, most particularly Bedouins and herders, thereby accounting for almost 50% of DG ECHO humanitarian aid. In the health sector, actions will focus on areas where closures and movement restrictions hinder access to services. Food distribution will target communities isolated from markets.

In Gaza, DG ECHO-funded humanitarian activities will extend to all the usual sectors of humanitarian aid to be provided in acute crises. Funding for water and sanitation programmes will be limited by the constraints of the current blockade. Other key areas to be supported in Gaza include health and psychosocial support.

Lebanon

The social and civic rights of the more than 400,000 Palestinian refugees living in the Lebanon are very restricted. In the 12 official camps managed by UNRWA (which house 52% of the refugees) as well as 42 non-recognised «gatherings», humanitarian needs remain high. DG ECHO will continue its interventions in the sectors of health, protection, food aid, subsistence, water and sanitation and shelter. Particular attention will be paid to the victims of the Nahr el Bared conflict.

Iraq

The humanitarian situation in Iraq appears to be stabilising despite the large number of displaced persons: about 1.7 million people are displaced inside the country (source: UNHCR) and 295,000 are registered refugees in neighbouring countries, in particular in Syria (224,000) and Jordan (53,000). Access and security problems in Iraq remain relatively acute, which makes the delivery of humanitarian aid particularly difficult. Following an improved Government response, the Commission will reduce its humanitarian aid effort slightly. Protection will remain the priority, with basic service provision for the most vulnerable Iraqi refugees. In Syria, continued drought might make an additional humanitarian intervention necessary.

Yemen

The humanitarian situation in Yemen continued to deteriorate in 2009. The country's scarce coping capacities are under severe pressure due to the war in the Northern Governorates (with access to beneficiaries being hampered by the growing insecurity, even outside the war zone) and the influx of mixed migration from the Horn of Africa. Therefore, DG ECHO will support protection and assistance actions in favour of populations affected by the internal conflict and of the refugees landing on the shores of Yemen.

Saharawi refugees

The situation of Saharawi refugees in the Tindouf camps has deteriorated following the departure of teachers and medical doctors, and as a result of chronic malnutrition. The Commission's humanitarian aid will have to remain at the same level as in 2009 or be increased only slightly. The aid will continue to be invested in basic service provision in the sectors of food aid, health and nutrition, water and sanitation, shelter and basic non-food items. In the current context, a LRRD approach is impossible. However, particular attention will be paid to sectoral coordination, local capacity building, mid-term programming and the reliability of food aid flows.

3.4. Asia and the Pacific

Afghanistan

The deterioration of the security situation and the consequences of extensive military operations, aggravated by years of drought and recurrent small scale disasters, have caused a sharp increase in humanitarian needs. In 2010 the first priority will be to support the refugees returning to Afghanistan from Pakistan and Iran and people affected by displacement internally. The aim will be to meet beneficiaries' needs for shelter, food, water, sanitation and hygiene education, with protection and DRR as cross-cutting priorities.

As emergency health needs have re-emerged, DG ECHO will re-engage in this sector, especially in remote areas, focusing in particular on acute malnutrition and outbreaks of disease. DG ECHO will intensify its efforts to implement a coherent LRRD approach involving local communities. Support for humanitarian coordination and advocacy efforts will continue, as well as for security coordination and humanitarian flights to facilitate access to remote locations.

Pakistan

The Commission will support humanitarian interventions in response to large population displacements in the North West Frontier Province and federally administered Tribal Areas, targeting IDPs, people returning to their areas of origin, host families and other conflict-affected populations. Protection of civilians, security of humanitarian workers, access to beneficiaries and respect for humanitarian space are major concerns in this context. DG ECHO will focus its interventions on basic humanitarian needs such as protection, food assistance, basic healthcare and water and sanitation. Basic livelihood support will be considered if the security environment permits. DG ECHO will also liaise with relevant stakeholders and advocate the integration of humanitarian considerations into reconstruction policies and programmes.

Bangladesh

The Commission will support 33,500 unregistered Rohingya refugees in two unofficial camps, providing a minimum level of humanitarian assistance, with the emphasis on protection. Discussions are ongoing with key stakeholders to find a lasting response to the situation. DG ECHO will also give food assistance to disadvantaged indigenous hill tribes who are suffering from acute household food insecurity as a result of plagues of rodents. Shelter and means of subsistence will be offered to the most affected victims of the May 2009 Cyclone Aila, who are still marooned on embankments. A coordinated LRRD approach for the post-emergency situation is under discussion with other development actors.

India

The Commission will fund humanitarian operations in support of the victims of the Kashmir conflict and of the Naxalite rebellion. Protection, psycho-social support and medical assistance remain highly relevant, and in Chhattisgarh there are increased needs for protection. Opportunities for LRRD in this context will depend on access, which itself is linked to the intensity of the conflict.

Nepal

In its current fragile post-conflict situation, Nepal's problems need to be addressed through a development approach rather than a humanitarian approach. Therefore, DG ECHO's humanitarian aid will be gradually phased out, although with a continuing emphasis on protection, basic health, water and sanitation. LRRD will be facilitated by the resumption of development cooperation, including the Commission's Food Facility. DG ECHO will continue to finance food aid for the 90,000 Bhutanese refugees living in camps, whilst encouraging a comprehensive solution for them. This strategy is likely to be revised according to the situation and new humanitarian needs that may arise along the year.

Sri Lanka

Since the Government's military victory over the Tamil Tigers in May 2009, the main focus of DG ECHO has been to provide protection and emergency life-saving assistance to over 280,000 people, mainly ethnic Tamils, held in detention camps in the north. These people are totally reliant on humanitarian assistance, but the attitude of the Government has resulted in a shrinking of the humanitarian space and created an ongoing dilemma for agencies, who must try to balance humanitarian imperatives and principles. DG ECHO will not contribute to any new funding in support of the detention camps, but it will contribute to the return process, provided that conditions are right and basic humanitarian principles are met. DG ECHO will provide assistance - mainly water and sanitation - to the 70,000 Sri Lankan refugees in camps in Tamil Nadu, India.

Burma/Myanmar – Thailand

DG ECHO will provide humanitarian assistance for vulnerable populations affected by the low-intensity conflict in Burma/Myanmar, focusing on the ethnic minorities living in the eastern border areas and on the stateless Rohingya population in northern Rakhine State. Key sectors of assistance will continue to be protection, food aid, nutrition, primary healthcare and water and sanitation. In the run-up to the parliamentary elections scheduled for 2010, heightened tensions can be expected between the Government and various ethnic groups, especially their armed factions.

In the camps in Thailand, more than 51,000 Burmese refugees have been resettled since the start of the resettlement process in 2006, most of them to the United States. However, this has not resulted in any substantial reduction in the number of people in the camps. In 2010, DG

ECHO will support food aid and primary healthcare activities in the camps, but will continue its strategy of scaling down the level of financial support and playing a pro-active role in encouraging enhanced donor coordination and defining lasting solutions with the Royal Thai Government.

Philippines

With no clear end to the conflict between the Government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in sight, some 350,000 people have now been displaced for over a year. They receive few basic services, are increasingly dependent on external aid and have largely exhausted their coping capacities. DG ECHO will support life-saving activities and protection in a difficult environment, plagued by insecurity, and will advocate the preservation of humanitarian access.

3.5. Latin America and the Caribbean

Colombia

The response to the internal conflict in Colombia, now more than four decades old, is the largest humanitarian intervention in Latin America. Each year more than 300,000 people are newly displaced and UNHCR estimates that 373,000 Colombians are refugees or are living in a refugee-like situation. Within Colombia, the lines between civil and military are becoming increasingly blurred, with a resulting reduction in humanitarian space. DG ECHO will provide emergency food, healthcare, water and sanitation, shelter and protection assistance, primarily to new IDPs and rural populations affected by conflict. Efforts will be made to involve state institutions locally and to hand over aid activities to them in the near future, so that they take full responsibility for their citizens. In Ecuador and Venezuela, DG ECHO will provide humanitarian assistance and protection to newly arrived victims of the conflict.

Haiti

DG ECHO's strategy in 2010 will be to reduce malnutrition and mortality through multi-sectoral assistance, to respond to disasters and to implement disaster preparedness activities. Food assistance protection, disaster risk reduction and environmental sustainability are key elements of this strategy, which will be carried out using money committed in the 2009 budget.

4. CONCLUSION

Overall trends and individual crisis situations demonstrate that the current main challenges of humanitarian aid are: an ever-smaller humanitarian space, with a growing number of countries where access to beneficiaries has become more difficult or impossible; a worsening security situation for beneficiaries and aid workers alike; a steep increase in the frequency and intensity of natural disasters; and the linking of short-term humanitarian aid to longer-term development cooperation activities.

This strategy sets out how the Commission's humanitarian aid operations will address these issues. It is clear that the answer lies not only in the quantity, but also in the quality of aid. In addition, advocacy at the highest levels will continue to be necessary in order to counter some of the most serious impediments to humanitarian aid, especially the diminishing humanitarian space and the disregard for international humanitarian law.