



Council of the
European Union

016039/EU XXVII. GP
Eingelangt am 17/03/20

Brussels, 17 March 2020
(OR. en)

6880/20

COHAFA 9
ALIM 2
DEVGEN 33
MAMA 42
MOG 15
COASI 27
COAFR 93
COLAC 18
COEST 58
PROCIV 16
RELEX 222
ONU 13
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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 13-14 February 2020

Delegations will find in annex the outcome of proceedings of the Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid held on 13-14 February 2020.

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted as set out in CM 1200/19 REV1, with the following changes: the item on harmonised reporting was postponed. The AOB item on the desert locust situation in the Greater Horn of Africa was turned into a full agenda item, including an informal exchange of views with FAO.

2. WFP Executive Board First Regular Session

COHAFA agreed the statements to be made on behalf of the EU at the WFP Executive Board First Regular Session, on agenda items 5a and 5b.

3. The future of humanitarian cash-based assistance (*incl. an informal exchange of views with CaLP*)

As part of an informal exchange of views, Karen Peachey, the Director of the Cash Learning Partnership (CaLP) briefed COHAFA on the future of cash-based assistance, its role and its benefits in international humanitarian aid. She highlighted the superior efficiency of cash-based assistance and the dignity it can give back to aid recipients. Based on a recent report by the Inter-Agency Research and Analysis Network (IARAN) and CaLP, she outlined four scenarios for how cash-based assistance might work in the future and drew attention to the importance of learning from the private sector and protecting data in distributing this type of aid.

Member States reaffirmed their interest in increasing their use of cash-based assistance and applauded the report. Discussion took place over how cash-based assistance can best progress in the future, obstacles such as laws against terrorist financing, and how to preserve humanitarian principles when collaborating with the private sector. The Commission emphasised their commitment to cash-based assistance in their own programming as well as their work to mitigate the impact of counter-terrorism and restrictive measures on the provision of humanitarian assistance, including advocacy at EU but also at UN level and with other donors for legislations that incorporate exemptions as well.

4. Member States' humanitarian priorities

Member States exchanged views on their geographical and policy priorities for humanitarian aid this year. The exercise was deemed to be a useful way to support coordination among donors.

5. Yemen (*incl. an informal exchange of views with Lise Grande, UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen (RC/HC)*)

As part of an informal exchange of views, Lise Grande, UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen (RC/HC) briefed COHAFA about the humanitarian situation in the country, following the Humanitarian Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) on Yemen held in Brussels earlier in the day. She highlighted the scale of the humanitarian operations underway in Yemen emphasising the non-permissive humanitarian environment, obstructions to humanitarian aid as well as threats to and assaults on aid workers in northern Yemen.

Member States emphasised their concern at the situation and discussed the joint-up response to the challenges faced by humanitarian actors, based on the outcome of the SOM.

In closed format, the EEAS briefed on recent political developments and EU diplomatic outreach and support to the UN-led peace process. The Commission complemented the humanitarian briefing by the HC/RC and highlighted particular challenges for the humanitarian response. The Commission also underlined the role of the SOM in bringing together UN Agencies, NGOs, Arab and Western donors to reach a common approach regarding the restrictions.

6. Coronavirus crisis

COHAFA discussed the humanitarian aid implications of the global coronavirus outbreak. The Council Secretariat outlined the work currently being done through the Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) arrangements, which were triggered in its information sharing mode by the Croatian Presidency on 28 January. The Commission complemented this by detailing their role in crisis response through the Union Civil Protection Mechanism and through contributions to the IPCR's Integrated Situational Awareness and Analysis (ISAA) reports and European Parliament debates. The Commission also presented information on vulnerabilities within Africa, which had no reported cases at the time of the discussion, and the WHO response plan to minimise the risk of a spread of cases in the continent.

Member States reaffirmed their commitments to countering the spread of the virus and highlighted the crucial role of the WHO, particularly in bolstering countries less able to contain the spread of the virus, such as in Africa. They recommended using past experience with preparedness with reference to the Ebola pandemic and linking this to the current crisis.

7. Syria and Syrian refugees in neighbouring countries *(incl. an informal exchange of views with the World Food Programme)*

In an informal exchange of views, Muhannad Hadi, WFP Regional Director and Corporate Response Director for the Syria regional crisis, accompanied by the WFP Country Directors Corinne Fleischer (Syria) and Abdallah Alwardat (Lebanon), briefed COHAFA on the humanitarian needs of Syrians within Syria and as refugees in Lebanon. Attention was drawn to the ongoing conflict in pockets of Syria, with a 20% increase in food insecurity since last year, and the strain placed on host countries by refugee influxes. The importance of longer-term livelihood and resilience assistance such as agricultural activities were emphasised.

The Member States restated their concern about the humanitarian situation, particularly with regards to refugees, and stressed that the conditions for their return to Syria were not yet in place. Challenges for cash-based assistance such as counter-terrorism finance laws were discussed, as well as methods to prevent radicalisation in refugee camps. Member States emphasised the importance of finding a political solution to end humanitarian crisis and the necessity of cross-border delivery of aid.

In closed format, the Commission briefed COHAFA on the deteriorating humanitarian situation in North West Syria, and the difficulty of humanitarian assistance to enter North East Syria; the extension of the cross-border resolution is crucial in this respect.

8. Humanitarian resolutions adopted by the UNGA 74

The Commission gave an overview of the humanitarian resolutions adopted by UNGA 74, outlining the main achievements and recommendations for the next cycle.

9. The Sahel (*incl. an informal exchange of views with Oxfam and the NRC*)

The Commission outlined the deteriorating security situation in the Sahel with an increasing need for humanitarian aid because of forced displacement, particularly in Burkina Faso, a food crisis, growing insecurity and a shrinking state presence.

In an informal exchange of views, Raphael Shilhav, Deputy Director with Oxfam's Brussels Office, and Jose Barahona, Norwegian Refugee Council, presented recent reporting on the humanitarian crisis in central Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger. Climate change and the desertification of farming land as a driver for territorial conflict between tribes was emphasised, as competing claims from different ethnic groups turned violent. They highlighted that the state's lack of credibility as a security provider led citizens in Sahel countries to increasingly form their own militias for protection, escalating the conflict further.

The Member States affirmed their commitment to stabilising the security situation in the Sahel and stressed the importance of coordination between civil and military actors and clusters of NGOs. The problem of dealing with conflict between ethnic groups over access to land was discussed, as well as how to focus on reshaping the security-development nexus to incorporate humanitarian aid and early warning.

In closed format, the EEAS briefed on the upcoming revision of the EU Sahel Strategy later in the year and on the political situations in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger.

The Commission outlined the state of play regarding the humanitarian situation and funding in the Sahel and their expected input regarding the update of the Sahel strategy, highlighting in particular the need to go further beyond the security agenda and the implementation of a multi-dimensional response to the crisis, the importance of respect of humanitarian principles, and effective Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination (CMCoord) for the region as enabling tools for humanitarian access, as well as for IHL and the Protection of Civilians dissemination.

Member States reaffirmed their commitment to an integrated approach and the need for more coordination across Member States and between sectors, as well as the importance of meaningful and inclusive political dialogue between actors and tackling the root causes of conflict such as poverty and climate change.

10. ASDHR Law in Nigeria

The Commission presented their assessment of the implications of a recent law passed in Nigeria concerning the regulation of NGOs in the northern province of Borno, highlighting its potential damaging consequences on principled aid delivery. The Commission drew attention to its ongoing dialogue with the Nigerian authorities over the matter.

Member States reiterated the Commission's concerns and stressed similar disquieting trends in Yemen and Chad. COHAFA asked the Commission to prepare draft common messages on the issue to ensure coherent dialogue on the matter with both the authorities and other donors.

11. Desert locust crisis (*incl. informal exchange of views with Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)*)

As part of an informal exchange of views, Rodrigo de Lapuerta, Director of FAO's Brussels Office, briefed COHAFA on the worst locust crisis East Africa had seen in 25 years, affecting a region with prior major food insecurity problems. Climate change is a long-term cause of the crisis and may also cause similar recurrences in the future. A FAO appeal requesting EUR 70 million has been upgraded to 76 million to cover Djibouti and Eritrea. The presentation also included details of existing efforts by the FAO including surveillance and the aerial spraying of pesticides along with operations led by OCHA and facilitated by the WFP.

The Commission said they were monitoring the situation closely and scaling up ground control measures to protect livelihoods since existing ground and area control measures in the region were largely insufficient. The Commission also drew attention to the harmful economic effects of a further escalation in the crisis, for instance to Uganda, a crucial regional exporter.

Member States expressed their concern at the locust crisis and stressed the need for coordination between organisations and donors.

12. AOB

a) Debriefing on the presentation of the Croatian Presidency's priorities in the field of humanitarian aid at the European Parliament's Development Committee

The Presidency debriefed on the presentation given by the Croatian Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Gordan Grlić Radman, and subsequent exchange of views with the Development Committee on current humanitarian challenges.

b) EDRIS

The Commission underlined the importance of keeping the EDRIS database of EU and Member State humanitarian assistance systematically updated. The Commission briefed on recent improvements made to EDRIS, notably with regards to data compatibility with IATI standards. Member States were invited to contact DG ECHO if interested in using this new feature.

- c) Debriefing on the "Higher Education in Emergencies" workshop (Lisbon, 20 January 2020)

The Portuguese delegation debriefed on this event.
