



## EUROPEAN CONSENSUS ON HUMANITARIAN AID

ECHO FACTSHEET

### Humanitarian Principles

- **Neutrality**

Humanitarian aid must not favour any side in an armed conflict or other dispute.

- **Humanity**

Human suffering must be addressed wherever it is found, with particular attention to the most vulnerable.

- **Independence**

Humanitarian objectives must remain separate from political, economic, military or other objectives. The sole purpose of humanitarian aid is to relieve and prevent the suffering of victims of humanitarian emergencies.

- **Impartiality**

Humanitarian aid must be provided solely on the basis of needs, without discrimination between or within affected populations.



Refugee camps in Dolo Ado, Ethiopia. Photo: WFP/Jiro Ose

### Increasing humanitarian aid effectiveness

- The 28 EU Member States together with the European Commission are collectively the world's largest relief donor. In an ever more complex and rapidly changing humanitarian environment, the European Union (EU) set out its vision based on common principles in a political document aiming at improving the coherence, effectiveness and quality of its humanitarian response.
- The Consensus reaffirms the fundamental principles of humanitarian aid: **neutrality, humanity, independence and impartiality**. Recent years have seen important changes in the nature and dynamics of war and conflict, with an ensuing decrease in the respect of international humanitarian law and an increase in the number of aid workers being targeted in the line of duty. This makes it all the more important to ensure that the roles and links between humanitarian actors and others such as civil protection actors and the military, are clearly defined and humanitarian principles are well understood and applied.
- The Consensus came with an Action Plan running from 2008 to 2013 which set the agenda for cooperation based on a quality aid approach. The European Commission evaluated the implementation of the Consensus and the Action Plan and the results are available [here](#).

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## The commitments of the consensus

- Respect of **humanitarian principles** and international law.
- Improved donor practice in the **delivery of aid**: quality, good humanitarian donorship practices and accountability. This includes the timely allocation of funding in proportion to needs and on the basis of strong needs assessments.
- **Better dialogue with other actors in response to emergencies**: clarification on the use of civil protection and military assets. Civil protection assets can make an important contribution to the response to natural disasters but should only be used as an exception in complex emergencies. Military assets should only be used as a last resort under specific conditions and in very limited circumstances. A humanitarian operation making use of military assets must retain its civilian nature, so while military assets may remain under military control the humanitarian operation as a whole must remain under the overall authority and control of humanitarians.
- Reinforcement of **'aid linkages'**: to enhance disaster risk reduction in order to reduce the vulnerability of people at risk from disasters; to link relief to long-term development aid to ensure a smooth transition between different support tools helping victims to recover from an emergency.
- Increased EU support for the **international humanitarian system** to ensure a better response to those in need: coordination mechanisms such as the 'cluster approach' and the designation of a Humanitarian Coordinator in an emergency. Better cooperation with NGOs, the Red Cross and Crescent movement and UN relief agencies with OCHA coordinating overall, each using their operational experience and special expertise in a given sector.

## The 10 basics of the consensus

1. Signed by the Presidents of the <b>Council of the European Union</b> , the <b>European Parliament</b> and the <b>European Commission</b> .	6. Reiterates EU support for <b>increased coordination</b> led by relevant UN bodies, to increase global capacity to respond to emergencies and avoid duplication of efforts.
2. Defines <b>common objectives</b> of EU humanitarian aid: provide needs-based emergency response to preserve life, prevent and alleviate human suffering and maintain human dignity.	7. Stresses importance of <b>'aid continuum'</b> by reducing risk and vulnerability through preparedness, transitioning into early recovery and linking to development aid.
3. Confirms <b>scope of EU humanitarian aid</b> , encompassing assistance, relief and protection operations during and in the immediate aftermath of the emergency.	8. Confirms that EU humanitarian aid is <b>not a crisis management tool</b> .
4. States <b>common principles and good practice</b> of EU humanitarian aid: principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence; international humanitarian, human rights, and refugee law; principles of donor best practice.	9. States that use of <b>military assets in humanitarian situations is exceptional</b> and must be in line with relevant guidelines.
5. Establishes <b>common framework to deliver humanitarian aid</b> based on coordination, coherence and complementarity, adequate and effective aid, effectiveness and accountability.	10. <b>Recognises special role of European Commission</b> in delivering humanitarian aid.

*The Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO) is part of the European Commission, the European Union's executive arm. Through ECHO funding, millions of people are helped each year in more than 70 countries through 200 partners (international NGO's, the Red Cross and Red Crescent movement, and specialised UN agencies).*

