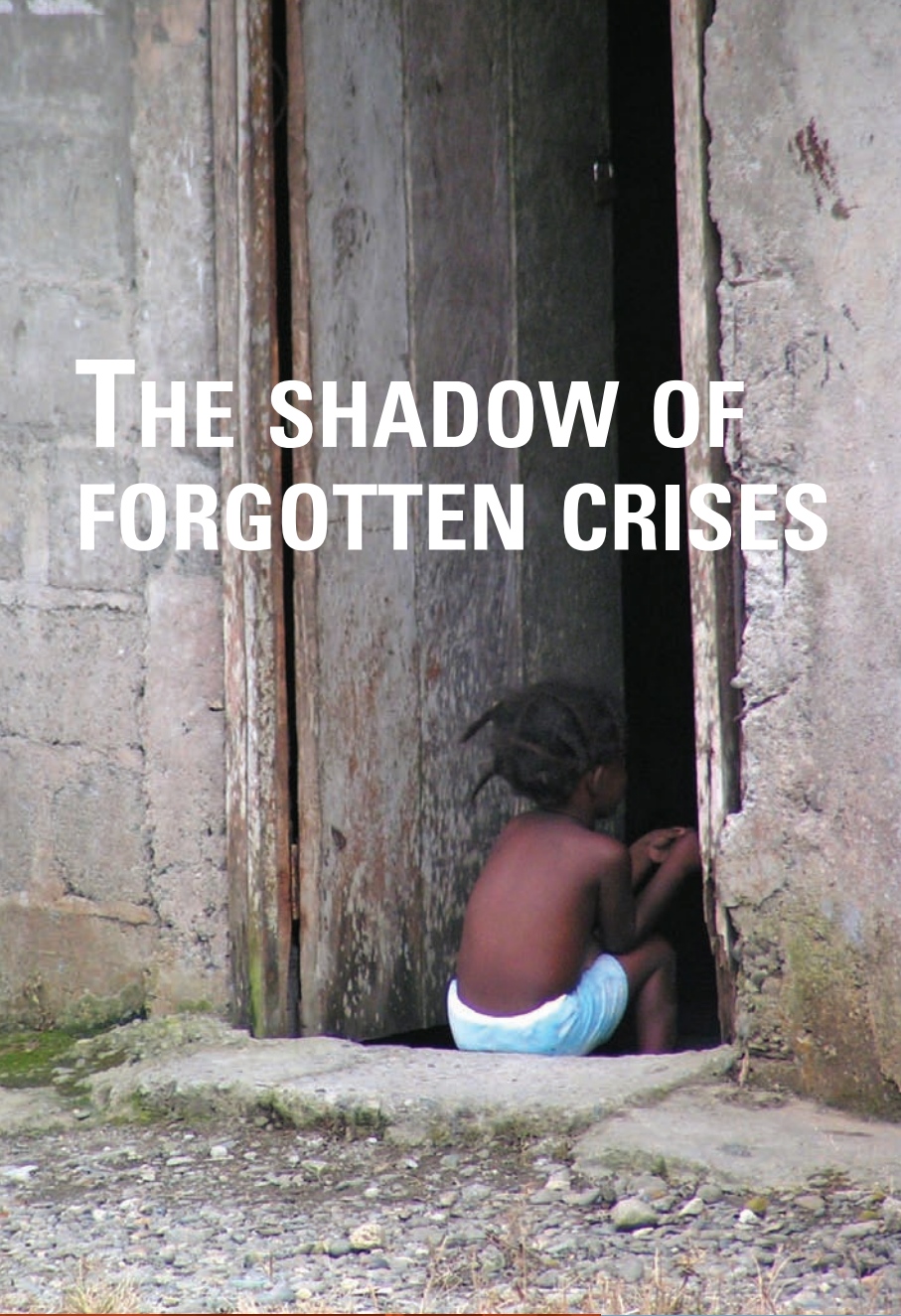


THE SHADOW OF FORGOTTEN CRISES



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SINCE 1957

EUROPEAN COMMISSION



Humanitarian Aid



"European humanitarian aid and development policy are among the clearest examples of the European Union in action. More importantly, they are flagships for our fundamental values: solidarity, respect for human dignity, equality, tolerance and personal commitment.

At a time when so much is possible technically, scientifically, politically and socially, millions of people still face the misery of extreme poverty, hunger and disease. They have been forgotten. This is not acceptable from either a moral or a political standpoint. We are obliged to respond out of human solidarity, but also for reasons of global security and stability.

We are the first generation that can face up to extreme poverty and state with genuine conviction: we have the money, the medicines and the science to end poverty. The question is, do we have the will?

A willingness to tackle misery and suffering should inspire our approach as citizens of the EU and of the world. The Union is already the world's largest donor and we must continue mobilising our formidable capacity to spread more peace, solidarity and justice.

By doing this, we can not only save tens of thousands of lives, but be a guiding force for a more peaceful and secure world."

Louis Michel

European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid



OUT OF SIGHT, OUT OF MIND

Most people would agree that crisis victims should be helped according to their needs. In reality, the amount of media publicity generated by a particular catastrophe often influences the scale of the international response. Giving concrete expression to the principle of solidarity – a core value of the European Union – means making sure that the people suffering in forgotten crises are not left behind.

The enormous generosity that accompanies highly-publicised disasters, such as the Indian Ocean tsunami, will obviously always be welcome.

There are other crises, however – often long-running conflicts – that slip off the media radar screens and, as a result, gradually disappear from public consciousness as well. The pressure on governments and aid agencies to “do something” then inevitably fades, skewing the relief system towards those whose tragedies are still graphically portrayed on our television screens.

Redressing the balance, so that people’s needs and vulnerability matter more than whether or not they are in the headlines, is not easy. But there are millions of people in the world who suffer in the shadows and many of them rely on international aid for their very survival.

The European Commission is committed to helping the most vulnerable. Its Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) applies a needs-based approach that includes a system for identifying forgotten crises and the funding of relief actions for those worst affected in disaster zones.

In this leaflet, we highlight some of the most “forgotten” crises of recent years.



NORTHERN CAUCASUS

Civilians were the main victims of the long running conflict between Chechen rebels and the military forces of Russia and their Chechen allies. The result was a tragic humanitarian situation: 200,000 people – a third of the republic's inhabitants, were displaced.

BURMA/MYANMAR

Conflict between the military regime and ethnic minorities crippled development in Myanmar since the 1960s, making it one of the poorest countries in Asia. Healthcare needs are most pressing, with almost no resources available. The country is believed to have more than half a million internally displaced people (IDPs). This is on top of the estimated 180,000 Burmese refugees living in neighbouring countries, of whom 150,000 are hosted by Thailand.

UGANDA

Northern Uganda, where the Lord's Resistance Army spread a particularly violent form of terror, suffered internal conflict for nearly 20 years. More than 1.5 million people were displaced within the country having fled from the violence. Uganda has also hosted more than 200,000 refugees from neighbouring countries in crisis (Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda).

SOMALIA

Since 1991, Somalia has endured a series of conflicts as well as drought and floods. Hundreds of thousands of people have had to flee their homes. The needs are enormous and affect all sectors.

COLOMBIA

Colombia has experienced violent internal conflict for many years, creating one of the world's largest problems of internal displacement. More than three million people have fled from their homes with around 200,000 new displacements every year. The conflict also continues to trigger movement to neighbouring countries, in particular Ecuador and Venezuela.



During humanitarian crises, forgotten or not, the basic needs are generally shelter, food, health and water/sanitation. Depending on the context, other needs may arise such as protection, de-mining or psycho-social care.

NEPAL: TWO CRISES IN ONE COUNTRY

Nepal, one of the poorest countries in the world, suffers from overpopulation and is vulnerable to natural disasters, in particular flooding and landslides during the monsoon. In addition, it has been the location of two largely forgotten crises.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the Bhutanese government refused to grant citizenship or the right to own property to a community of people of Nepalese origin who had been living in the country for more than 150 years. The government's decision was linked to the community's growing influence on the Bhutanese economy. Forced to flee, they took refuge in Nepal. However, the Kathmandu authorities held the newcomers to be Bhutanese nationals.

The refugees are caught in an impasse. They are not allowed to farm land and are officially forbidden to work in Nepal. Despite signs of progress between 1996 and 2003, the situation remains unresolved. The result is that more than 100,000 people live in camps in south-east Nepal, entirely dependent on international aid for their survival.

The second crisis involved Maoist guerrillas who began a campaign of violence in 1996. Regular clashes between the Nepalese security forces and Maoist rebels, who controlled parts of the countryside, had a serious impact on the civilian population. Most social services in rural areas ceased functioning with large numbers of displaced people fleeing to urban centres in Nepal or across the border into India. Approximately 12,000 people died in the conflict.

The two crises – both of a political nature – generated little coverage in the international media while the humanitarian needs became increasingly acute.

The Commission, following its objective of providing humanitarian aid for those who are most vulnerable, has been engaged in Nepal since 1995.

Different population groups and sectors are involved:

- Refugees from Bhutan – food aid
- Vulnerable people in Nepal – projects dealing with protection, healthcare and water/sanitation
- Poor people particularly exposed to risks of natural disaster – projects to improve preparedness and reduce vulnerability (DIPECHO)



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

HUMANITARIAN AID AT A GLANCE

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid (ECHO) is the service that manages the humanitarian aid financed by the European Community budget. The main aim of this aid is to save and preserve life during emergencies and their immediate aftermath in natural disasters or conflicts.

Humanitarian aid is based on the core values of humanity and solidarity and built on the fundamental principles of impartiality, non-discrimination and independence.

As a donor, the European Commission does not implement projects directly in the field but supports partner organisations specialised in humanitarian aid. These operational partners include United Nations humanitarian organisations, the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that have signed a partnership agreement with the Commission.

ECHO's role is also to boost coordination between Member States, third party donors, international humanitarian institutions and non-governmental organisations.

The European Commission is one of the world's largest humanitarian aid donors

Since it was set up in 1992, the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) has financed humanitarian operations in more than 100 countries. It has an annual budget of around € 800 million.



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