What is solidarity?

Humanitarian aid brochure
Hallo,

I’m nine and I live in Gulado, in the Darfur region of Sudan in Africa. Do you know it? Before, I lived in a village and I had something to eat every day. We didn’t have much but it was enough to live on. And I had fun.

And then there was a lot of fighting in my country. One day the soldiers arrived, they burnt everything and killed lots of people in my village. There was nothing left. When they arrived I was picking mangoes a few metres away. They attacked me but didn’t kill me. I was wounded and terrified.

From one day to the next there was nothing left of my life. I had no house, no food and nowhere to go. And I was afraid as the soldiers could return at any time. Where was I to go? Where was I to sleep? Where was I to get anything to eat or drink? And who would protect me?

Inaya (Sudan)
The European Union (EU) is a family of democratic European countries working together with the aim of **improving the lives of its citizens and building a better world.**

Of course there are still differences within the EU. Some countries are richer than others, although these differences will gradually be reduced. But most of us are privileged compared with other regions of the world.

In too many places, people don’t even have such basic necessities as water, food, shelter or medical care.

And, you can’t live without these things.

Did you know that the European Union plays an important part in helping people in need worldwide?

Solidarity is not just something that applies within our borders. It is a basic value of the European Union that needs to be demonstrated towards all human beings across the world.

This brochure explains how the EU provides life-saving help to millions of vulnerable people in less fortunate parts of the world.
WHAT IS A HUMANITARIAN CRISIS?

A humanitarian crisis is when the lives of whole communities or countries are threatened as a result of:
- a natural disaster (earthquake, flooding, drought, epidemics, etc.) or
- a man-made disaster (insecurity, war, etc.),
when their essential needs cannot be met and their country does not have the means to help them.

Victims of humanitarian crises often have only one hope of survival: the hope that other countries – with the resources to help – will come to their aid. This is called international solidarity. The European Commission, which is the European Union’s administrative body, has a part to play here through what is known as humanitarian aid policy. The EU has decided to use some of the funds in its budget to provide rapid assistance to victims of humanitarian crises throughout the world.

Humanitarian aid is essential aid given to people who most need it, irrespective of their race, religion, gender, nationality or political convictions. It is free and the only condition is that there is a genuine need.
In humanitarian crises, the most essential needs are usually water, food, healthcare and shelter (see below). But there are other very important needs as well that sometimes have to be met: protection, especially for children, schooling, demining, etc.

We are all familiar with humanitarian crises like the Indian Ocean tsunami that got a lot of television and newspaper coverage.

But there are other crises that people hardly ever talk about, like the conflict in northern Uganda. There was fighting there for more than 20 years and over a million people were in desperate need. These are known as “forgotten crises”.

Crises covered by the media attract aid more easily than forgotten crises. This is unfair. The European Commission helps people in need whether or not they appear on the television.
HOW DOES EU AID REACH THE PEOPLE WHO NEED IT?

The Commission’s section of the EU budget covers various sectors which include:

- Agriculture
- Employment
- Education and training
- Humanitarian aid
- Other

Taxes, charges and other levies in EU Member States

European Union budget
The European Commission always uses specialised organisations to help people. They receive funds from the Commission to carry out humanitarian aid projects. Examples:

**Médecins Sans Frontières**
Non-governmental organisation that provides medical assistance to people in distress

**RED CROSS**
This is the largest humanitarian organisation in the world. It also works in various humanitarian aid areas: health, shelter, personal protection, etc.

**OXFAM**
Non-governmental organisation specialising in various humanitarian aid sectors: distribution of equipment, drinking water, tents, etc.

**UNICEF**
Unicef is a United Nations agency charged with ensuring respect for children's rights in the world in both times of peace and war

And many others...

Examples of projects carried out by partner organisations with funding from the Commission in humanitarian crises:

- Treatment for the wounded following the earthquake in Pakistan
- Setting up of tents for victims of the tsunami in Indonesia
- Opening of a centre to help refugee women give birth in the Western Sahara
- Opening of a renutrition centre for children suffering famine in Somalia
Are there many countries affected by humanitarian crises?

The following map of the world helps provide an answer. It shows:
- in blue: the European Union
- in orange: the countries/territories affected by a humanitarian crisis to which the European Commission has given humanitarian aid recently.

Africa
Angola
Benin
Burkina Faso
Burundi
Cape Verde
Chad
Comoros
Congo (Republic of)
Congo (Democratic Republic of)
Côte d'Ivoire
Eritrea
Ethiopia
Gambia
Ghana
Guinea
Guinea-Bissau
Kenya
Lesotho
Liberia
Madagascar
Malawi
Mali
Mauritania
Mozambique
Niger

Nigeria
Uganda
Rwanda
Senegal
Sierra Leone
Somalia
Sudan
Swaziland
Tanzania
Togo
Zambia
Zimbabwe

Central Asia
Southern Caucasus (Chechnya)
Georgia
Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Mongolia
Tajikistan
Turkmenistan
Uzbekistan

Middle East and North Africa
Algeria (Western Sahara)
Jordan
Lebanon
Syria
Palestinian Territories
Turkey
Yemen

South Asia
Afghanistan
Bangladesh
India
Iran
Maldives
Nepal
Pakistan
Sri Lanka

South-east Asia/Pacific
Cambodia
Cook Islands
East Timor
Indonesia
Laos
North Korea
Myanmar/Burma
Papua New Guinea
Philippines

Solomon Islands
Thailand
Vietnam

Latin America/Caribbean
Bolivia
Costa Rica
Colombia
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
El Salvador
Grenada
Guatemala
Guyana
Haiti
Honduras
Nicaragua
Panama
Peru
Suriname
Turks and Caicos
Venezuela
Children are often the first victims in a crisis – because they are more vulnerable and because they depend on adults to give them what they need to grow. Protecting and helping children is a priority.

“The child shall in all circumstances be among the first to receive protection and relief”
Principle 8 of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child proclaimed by the United Nations on 20 November 1959

I never knew there were so MANY countries in need!
Can you imagine living without water? As soon as you get up you turn on the tap, drink, wash, flush the toilet, and so on. You have access to water all day long at home! But **1.1 billion people – one in five of the world’s population** – do not.

Access to water is not enough on its own. It has to be clean and safe as polluted water brings diseases and serious epidemics. A natural disaster can destroy all water supply and treatment systems (sewers, etc.) as well as crops and food stocks. When people have to flee from fighting, they cannot carry water with them.

Water is the main cause of mortality in the world. Dirty and unsafe water causes many diseases and kills eight million human beings every year, most of them children.

The European Commission supports projects to:
- supply and distribute drinking water where it is needed
- repair or build water supply systems (wells, pipes, etc.)
- repair or build water treatment or sanitation systems (sewers, water treatment centres, toilets, etc.).
You have to have food to live. This might seem obvious to us in Europe. It's something we don't even think about. If you feel peckish you can take a snack from your bag, and when you get home in the evening you have a meal before going to bed. But many people have very little, if ANYTHING at all to eat.

- Flooding or prolonged drought can destroy entire crops.
- Conflict or war can mean millions of people have to flee to safety. They take to the roads or flee to neighbouring countries and have no way of earning a living. Or armed groups steal what food there is.

Every day 24,000 people die from hunger-related problems in the world. That is one person every four seconds.

The European Commission finances projects to:
- distribute food
- care for malnourished children and teach them to start eating gradually (This has to be carefully controlled as it is dangerous to start eating large amounts immediately if you have had little or nothing for a long time. The body has to recover slowly)
- provide tools and seeds for replanting
- provide or treat sick livestock

It does all it can to help people get food until a long-term solution can be found by their governments.
A roof over your head, walls to protect you, a place where you feel safe, a bed to sleep in ……you can lose all that suddenly:

- in conflicts when people have to flee their region or country to escape violence, and save their lives and families;
- in natural disasters such as earthquakes or floods, when houses are totally destroyed.

There are more than 35 million people in the world who have had to flee their homes, and 10 million of them have had to seek refuge in another country.

The European Commission helps them by financing projects to:
- set up tent camps providing them with shelter until they can return home
- help rebuild homes where possible
- provide materials so that they can rebuild their houses themselves

“The child shall enjoy the benefits of social security. He shall be entitled to grow and develop in health; to this end, special care and protection shall be provided both to him and his mother, including adequate pre-natal and post-natal care. The child shall have the right to adequate nutrition, housing, recreation and medical services.”

Principle 4 of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child proclaimed by the UN on 20 November 1959.
If everything has been destroyed there is obviously no health care.

Diseases that are no longer serious or are easily treatable in our countries are often deadly in humanitarian crisis zones. The sick are very often children, already weakened by lack of food and drinking water, who have not been vaccinated and cannot get medical treatment.

In many cases simple treatment or vaccination would save their lives. But not everybody has access to such things! 6 000 children die every day from diarrhoea, which is so easy to treat in our own countries!

The European Commission finances projects to:
- provide medicines and medical equipment
- rehabilitate hospitals and consulting rooms
- train medical staff on the spot
- provide public information on health issues and organise vaccination campaigns
These are vital issues! Where can I learn more about them?

http://ec.europa.eu/echo
Reading this brochure should help you to understand that you are part of a wider community that shows solidarity with the rest of the world. Millions of lives are saved each year thanks to political decisions to take practical action in support of those who are most vulnerable. These are not just words.

Solidarity is something we should all be aware of – it is one of the values that shapes who we are and who we will become.

Solidarity, respect for human dignity, equality, tolerance and personal commitment

These are values we can all apply in our daily lives to build a fairer world.

We are all involved because we are all citizens of the same world.

Louis Michel
European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Development

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