



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

HUMANITARIAN AID OFFICE (ECHO)

ECHO AID STRATEGY 2004

18.12.2003

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following document establishes the strategic guidelines for ECHO's operations in humanitarian aid for 2004. As the Community's Humanitarian Aid Office, ECHO provides assistance on a non-discriminatory basis to populations of third countries that are affected by disasters both man made and natural and to those affected by conflicts. ECHO upholds to provide this assistance solely determined on the basis of needs and to not be subject to political considerations. ECHO also aims to assist affected populations to return to self-sufficiency, to this end ECHO is actively involved in implementing the linkage between relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD). The Office also works at promoting disaster preparedness. The civilian population continues to be a prime target of and victim to violent conflicts. Asia and Africa are the regions of the world most afflicted. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) world-wide remains at 25 million. In absolute figures the numbers of refugees dropped after the return of 2 million civilians to Afghanistan, bringing the global number down to 10.4 million refugees. However, this does not correspond to less humanitarian needs as not only IDPs and refugees are in need of assistance but also returnees.

On a global level the number of natural disasters has increased during the last decade, with famine being the single greatest cause of death. Here again another set of data has to be looked at in order to assess the humanitarian situation: Although the number of deaths reported globally due to natural disasters has decreased, the number of people affected has risen, thus causing greater humanitarian needs.

In 2004 ECHO will continue to intervene in areas of greatest humanitarian needs as identified in its 2004 global needs assessment: in Africa -Horn, Great Lakes, West Africa and Southern Africa- and certain parts of Asia, notably -Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition, the humanitarian situation in the Middle East continues to deteriorate dramatically. ECHO will also continue to pay specific attention to forgotten crises and forgotten needs, as in Haiti, Western Sahara, Myanmar/Burma, Nepal, Russia (Chechnya), Sudan, Somalia, Thailand (Burmese border), and Uganda. ECHO also continues to commit itself to appropriately addressing cross-cutting issues such as LRRD and disaster preparedness, child related activities and water. Water has been chosen as a new horizontal priority because of its importance in terms of a life saving response in humanitarian crises and as one of the elements or factors at the origin of natural disasters. ECHO's information and communication strategy in 2004 will continue to focus on advocacy to maintain an independent "humanitarian space" in crisis situations and to preserve the dignity of populations in humanitarian disasters.

This will be of particular importance as 2004 will see a certain number of significant changes in the institutional environment at various levels, with the election of a new European Parliament, the accession of 10 new Member States and the appointment of a new Commission.

2. MISSION STATEMENT

ECHO - the Community's Humanitarian Aid Office is the service responsible for providing humanitarian assistance on a non-discriminatory basis to third countries, through which the Commission expresses the concrete solidarity of the European

Union with those affected by conflicts or disasters, both natural and man-made, all over the world. The decisions and actions taken by the Office are determined solely by the assessment of humanitarian needs and are not guided by or subject to political considerations.

ECHO's mission is to fund the co-ordinated delivery of Community humanitarian assistance and protection through partner humanitarian organisations (NGOs and international organisations) in order to save and preserve life, reduce or prevent suffering and safeguard the integrity and dignity of third country populations affected by humanitarian crises. Its assistance also aims at facilitating, together with other aid instruments, the subsequent return of populations to self-sufficiency wherever and whenever possible, to permit the phasing out of ECHO funding in good conditions. In that perspective, the Humanitarian Aid Office is actively engaged in implementing the linkage between relief, rehabilitation and development (LRRD) and in developing stronger co-operation with other Commission services or other donors. Beyond the direct response to humanitarian need in such situations, its policy also aims at contributing positively to the establishment at international level of a more integrated and sustainable approach to the solution of crises/problems of a complex nature.

Based on its experience in addressing disasters, ECHO also works at promoting disaster preparedness -as part of an overall Commission Disaster Prevention and Preparedness approach- in order to reduce both vulnerability and exposure of people to risks and disasters as well as to reduce economic costs of such disasters.

Humanitarian aid operates in difficult environments characterised by unpredictability, volatility, insecurity and problematic access to victims. The complex and volatile conditions the Office is working in as well as the fact that the humanitarian operations are carried out by third parties make the achievement of set policy objectives a challenging task. The achievement of set policy objectives may depend on factors that are not immediately and directly under its operational control.

3. INTRODUCTION

The present strategy document is part of ECHO's strategic planning and programming cycle that has been consolidated in the last two years, profiting from the Commission reform in general and the introduction of a system of performance management in particular.

ECHO's aid strategy 2004 should be seen as a key instrument in leading an open, broad and transparent dialogue with its partners and humanitarian stakeholders. It is to be considered also as part of the response that the Office intends to give in the concrete implementation of the *Principles and Good Practices of Humanitarian Donorship* and the *Implementation Plan for Good Humanitarian Donorship* ('hereafter *Good Donorship Principles*') that were agreed in Stockholm on 16-17 June 2003.

The *Good Donorship Principles* stipulate that humanitarian funding should be allocated in proportion to needs and on the basis of needs assessments, thereby reflecting the cornerstones of ECHO's programming principles. The *Good Donorship Principles* also affirm the primary position of civilian organisations in

implementing humanitarian action and call on donors to support the 1994 Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief as well as the 2003 Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to Support United Nations Humanitarian activities in Complex Emergencies (hereafter 'MCDA guidelines'). In 2003 ECHO, together with the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs ('OCHA'), organised the launch of the 2003 guidelines to show its unrelenting support to the philosophy on which they are based, namely that humanitarian action has to keep its civil nature and must be based on the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and non-discrimination. Defending and advocating the need to respect the "humanitarian space" will be a continued priority.

In 2004, the Humanitarian Aid Office will have to work within a framework of institutional transition. On 1 May 2004, ten new Member States will join the European Union. In June 2004, citizens throughout the European Union will have the opportunity to vote in elections for the European Parliament. Finally, on 1 November 2004, the new Commission will take up office.

At the moment of the publication of this strategy, it is not yet clear how the works of the Intergovernmental Conference (IGC) will eventually be followed up in 2004. The draft Constitutional Treaty prepared by the Convention had provided for a specific provision dealing with humanitarian aid, stressing that humanitarian aid operations shall be concluded in compliance with the principles of international humanitarian law, in particular impartiality and non-discrimination. Caution and vigilance will have to be maintained in order to preserve in any future debate on external policy and on the common defence and security policy of the Union the principles governing humanitarian aid and the humanitarian space.

After having chaired the Donor Support Group (i.e. the annual meeting of the principal Donors of the ICRC) in June 2003, ECHO hosted the launch of the UN Consolidated Appeals (CAP) for 2004 in Brussels in November 2003 focusing on "forgotten crises. It will stay an active donor aiming at a close co-ordination with other major donors and at supporting responsibly the United Nations Consolidated Interagency Appeals and the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement Appeals – as highlighted by the Good Donorship Principles. At the same time, ECHO will maintain the approach of a "large base" partnership and a broad dialogue with the humanitarian NGOs on crucial humanitarian issues.

The Office will also actively participate in the preparation of the Commission's proposal for the new financial perspectives from 2007 onwards, with emphasis on the chapter relevant for humanitarian aid.

4. GLOBAL HUMANITARIAN SITUATION AND OUTLOOK FOR 2004

Research has shown that after the Cold War, in contrast to the previously predominant interstate conflicts, intra-state conflicts have become more and more important. This development heavily affects the civilian population, which has become a prime target of violent conflicts. Following the classification done by the

Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research¹, evidence suggest that between December 2002 and July 2003 no less than 165 political conflicts have been going on, 52 of which were considered violent disputes (crises, severe crises or war) against 113 non-violent conflicts (latent conflict, manifest conflict). Research findings again prove Asia and Africa to be the regions with the highest number of violent conflicts, often triggering large-scale uprooting of populations and human suffering.

The number of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs) highlights the humanitarian dimension of the geopolitical situation. In 2002, the total number of refugees on a global level dropped by nearly 14 % from 12 million to 10.4 million compared to 2001.² The principal reason lies in the return of some 2 million civilians to Afghanistan. The decrease in uprooted people did not imply a decrease in humanitarian needs, as the refugees who returned to Afghanistan continue to need help in rebuilding their lives. The number of returnees assisted by UNHCR consequently climbed from half a million in 2001 to nearly 2.5 million in 2002. The UNHCR figures do not reflect the more than 4 million Palestine refugees who are registered with the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).³ Consequently, despite the fact that the number of new refugees registered by the UNHCR (nearly 300.000) was 69 % lower than in 2001, with the largest displacements occurring in sub-Saharan Africa, overall needs have increased. According to UNHCR Asia hosts the largest refugee population worldwide (4.2 million) followed by Africa (3.34 million) and Europe (2.14 million).

The number of IDPs in the world remains at 25 million, with Africa accounting for more IDPs than the rest of the world taken together, with a total of 13 million people driven from homes by conflict⁴. The constant number of 25 million of IDPs in 2002 suggests a static situation, whereas in reality there has been major movement of displaced people with about three million IDPs returning to their homes and a similar number of people being newly displaced. Both groups need assistance.

As outlined by the World Disasters Report 2003⁵, in 2002 more disasters were reported than in any year during the decade spanning from 1992 – 2001. Disasters in 2002 caused fewer deaths but had more impact than in the preceding decade. 24.500 people were reported killed last year as compared to the decade's average of 62.000 killed per year. However, no less than 608 million are estimated to have been affected, representing three times the annual average from 1992–2001. People from

¹ Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIC), "Early Detection of Man-made Crises", Intermediate Report to ECHO (August, 2003), http://www.hiik.de/en/index_e.htm.

² <http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/tehis/vtx/basics> in: "Refugees by Numbers", 2003 Edition

³ <http://www.un.org/unrwa/publications/index.html>; UNRWA's definition of a refugee includes the descendants of persons who became refugees in 1948. The number of registered Palestine refugees has subsequently grown from 914, 000 in 1950 to more the four million in 2003, and continues to rise due to natural population growth

⁴ http://www.idpproject.org/global_overview.htm

⁵ <http://www.ifrc.org/publicat/wdr2003/> : IFRC World Disasters Report 2003 Homepage

the world's least developed countries have a higher risk of becoming a victim to a disaster. Of the 24 500 reported killed in 2002, 94% lived in developing countries.

On a global level, the number of weather related disasters has risen from an annual average of 200 for the period 1993-1997 to an annual average of 331 in the period 1998-2002. During the last decade famine appears to have caused the greatest number of deaths (275.000 people killed, almost half of all reported fatalities), whereas floods affected more people than any other natural or technological disaster (140 million on a yearly average). As highlighted by the IFRC World Disasters Report 2003, reported global deaths have decreased by 39 % when comparing the decades 1983 –1992 and 1993-2002, while the number of people affected has risen by 54 % over that same period, causing greater humanitarian needs.

When responding to natural and man-made crises, humanitarian donors and humanitarian organisations are increasingly being confronted with the growing impact of HIV/AIDS on the population targeted by the relief operations. In emergency situations, the interplay between AIDS and other factors at the origin of a crisis poses an additional challenge for both the affected communities as well as for the humanitarian agencies. Far from being under control, the AIDS pandemic continues to expand. In Southern Africa, AIDS is now the leading cause of death and globally the fourth-biggest killer disease. ECHO's involvement in the fight against AIDS is limited by its humanitarian mandate to save life in the immediate aftermath of a crisis as well as by the resources at its disposal. Where appropriate and feasible, ECHO' approach will continuously be to mainstream HIV/AIDS considerations into humanitarian activities when HIV/AIDS has an impact on the effectiveness of the supported activity and the coping capacity of the affected population. The objective of ECHO's support is to contribute to the reduction of HIV transmission and deaths during humanitarian operations. However, HIV/AIDS needs a longer-term commitment and demands a development approach going beyond the emergency situations⁶. ECHO's response to the issue, thus, can only be limited to and pertinent to its emergency mandate and type of response, which is short-term in nature

The above trends confirm ECHO's strategic choices of the past: to focus operations on its "core mandate" (i.e. to preserve life during emergencies and their aftermath) while promoting an active linkage policy between emergency and more longer term aid instruments.

5. GENERAL PROGRAMMING PRINCIPLES AND MAIN OBJECTIVES FOR 2004

In keeping with best practices of key humanitarian players and in accordance with Art. 16 of Regulation 1257/96, ECHO defines horizontal as well as geographical programming principles for humanitarian operations undertaken in the year ahead. These programming principles take into account global trends, the lessons learned

⁶ See the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Programme for Action: Accelerated action on HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis in the context of poverty reduction, COM (2001) 96 final. The document outlines a broad and coherent Community response, over the period 2001-2006, to the global emergency caused by the three major communicable diseases, HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis.

on the implementation of aid operations in the field as well as its resource limitations in human- and budgetary terms. The programming principles for 2004 follow-on from the principles that underpinned its aid strategy in previous years. Those principles were shared and supported by Members States, the European Parliament and major partners alike, and proved to give appropriate response to real needs.

- **Identify and intervene in the areas of greatest humanitarian needs**

ECHO's need assessment combines a bottom-up with a top down approach. Assessment of humanitarian needs in the field is contrasted with relevant statistical data (refugees, IDPs, mortality rates, disaster proneness). For the purpose of planning 2004 humanitarian operations, the global needs assessment was further refined, replacing the indicator "general under-nourishment of population" with "children under weight for age", better taking into account the needs of children. This is in line with the strategic orientation to pay specific attention to their needs. According to ECHO's global needs assessment 2004, the areas of greatest humanitarian needs are to be found at the current stage in Africa (Horn, Great Lakes, West Africa and Southern Africa) and Asia (Iraq, Afghanistan). In addition, the humanitarian situation in the Middle East deteriorates dramatically.

- **Pay specific attention to "forgotten crises" and "forgotten needs".**

The above principle is a direct expression of a needs-based humanitarian approach, focusing humanitarian operations on the needs of people. ECHO will thus continue to support high-need crises independent of their degree of media coverage or interest. A bottom-up view (field level) was combined with a top-down approach to identify high-need humanitarian crises that receive low media and donor attention. In 2004, the Office will respond to humanitarian needs generated by the following most forgotten crises: Haiti, Western Sahara, Myanmar/Burma, Nepal, Russia (Chechnya), Sudan, Somalia, Thailand (Burmese border), and Northern Uganda.

- **Commit itself to appropriately address cross-cutting issues:**

- LRRD and Disaster Preparedness,
- Child related activities and
- Water

LRRD as part and parcel of an effective and sustainable humanitarian aid policy will stay a constant consideration in the planning and managing of humanitarian operations⁷. ECHO will continue to implement an active LRRD policy. In 2004, ECHO will build on the results of the work of the LRRD/DPP Interservice Group

⁷ In this context ECHO welcomes the "4 R" approach (Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction) advocated by the UNHCR. The "4 R" approach highlights the necessity to concentrate on the links between refugee needs and development and on how development assistance can promote durable solutions for refugees. See Working document of the Informal Consultative Group on Durable Solutions (July 2002). ECHO has already supported this approach by financing operations like the repatriation of Angolan refugees from Zambia and DRC while at the same time playing an advocacy role for their reintegration through longer-term intervention instruments.

established in the Commission in 2003, which suggested practical steps for eight countries and two regions (Angola, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Sudan, Burundi, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, West Africa and Central America) with a view of ensuring an effective transition from emergency aid to the longer term co-operation cycle.

With respect to **DIPECHO**, the strategy focuses on three elements: first, a moderate increase in the budget, second, more rapid decision-making procedures keeping a high level of transparency and third, a better targeting of operations towards the most vulnerable areas to be covered by Action Plans for Central America, South East Asia, Central Asia and the Caribbean⁸, all of which essentially follow a two-year cycle. Mainstreaming disaster preparedness in relief operations will be reinforced by improving the methodology to identify and report on such operations. Finally, advocacy will be reinforced in two ways: by promoting the integration of DPP measures into longer term intervention instruments managed by other Commission services and donors and by strengthening ECHO's participation in international disaster reduction networks. ECHO will play an active role to ensure that DPP measures become a component of a broader LRRD approach.

The emphasis on **children** was already part of the 2003 aid strategy, in line with ECHO's needs-based approach, since children are those with the lowest defence mechanism when thrown into a humanitarian crisis. In 2004, the Office will continue to promote the mainstreaming of child-related activities into humanitarian operations. A first assessment showed that a well-defined harmonised methodology is needed to make child-related activities in humanitarian operations comparable and to measure their impact, allowing a move from the measurement of pure outputs (e.g. quantity of food provided) to a measurement of results (e.g. number of lives saved). Till the end of 2004 ECHO will aim to develop such a methodology, building to a large extent on best practices and covering works already developed by many humanitarian organisations while also using its own practices

A regular supply of drinking water is one of the most basic humanitarian needs, and during a humanitarian crises it becomes a daily factor of survival. Water is also crucial to health (directly or indirectly through sanitation) and food security as well as prospects for longer-term rehabilitation and reconstruction. Thus, it was decided to add **water** to ECHO's horizontal objectives. The emphasis in 2004 will not yet be on mainstreaming (which will be feasible partly as from 2005 on), but on methodological clarification. ECHO will start to develop methodological instruments in 2004 to better gauge the impact of various water related activities during humanitarian aid operations. Also, water is not only a life-saving resource but can itself become the cause of human suffering and disaster, i.e. during floods. Instruments to better forecast and rapidly assess the humanitarian needs caused by such water-related natural disasters will also be refined. ECHO's focus on water will also imply an advocacy role, informing public opinion about the necessity of water-related activities in humanitarian operations and the need for an appropriate donors' response when faced with a natural disaster caused by water or by the lack of it (drought events).

⁸ Depending on the outcome of the evaluation of DPP activities for the region in the past. See also p. 11

6. GEOGRAPHICAL AND SECTORAL PRIORITIES IN 2004

The 2004 strategy will focus on the following regional priorities:

Sub-Saharan Africa:

Large-scale humanitarian needs persist in all the regions in Africa. . Whilst the pressure caused by the drought in Southern Africa has eased in some of the countries concerned, intensified conflicts in DRC and West Africa have put additional challenges to the humanitarian community.

The humanitarian crisis brought about by drought and governments' poor food security policies in **Southern Africa** has improved in some countries as a result of more favourable agricultural conditions. In particular **Malawi** and **Zambia** are no longer expected to be in need of emergency food aid beyond the next harvest season, although pockets of need persist. In **Malawi**, support for Nutritional Rehabilitation Units ('NRUs') will continue and the expansion of a community-based therapeutic feeding programme for malnourished children who cannot access NRUs will be expanded. Extremely vulnerable families affected by HIV/AIDS will be assisted with a food security operation. This is in contrast to the situation in **Zimbabwe**, where the political crisis with its far-reaching economic and humanitarian implications, is far from being resolved. A large part of the population will remain in acute need of humanitarian support through much of 2004. ECHO will stay engaged as long as access is given to people in need and the implementation of humanitarian operations can be done without compromising humanitarian principles. **Lesotho** may need food aid throughout 2004, particularly in the southern districts. For **Swaziland**, pockets of needs also persist. For both countries, the overwhelming humanitarian challenge is the mitigation of the impact of HIV/AIDS. Getting and keeping children, particularly girls, in school is the priority in this regard.

Following the 2002-peace agreement ending the civil war in **Angola**, the process of rehabilitation of the country is now the major challenge, with enormous humanitarian needs still to be met. Of crucial importance will be the resettlement of war-affected populations, including more than 1 million IDPs and up to 450,000 refugees from neighbouring countries, in particular from DRC and Zambia. ECHO's strategy will remain closely focused on an **LRRD** approach, with primary health, food security and education being the main sectors.

Among the countries being assisted in the **Horn of Africa**, the main focus will remain on **Sudan** where 20 years of civil war and frequent occurrence of natural disasters have devastated large parts of the country. Regardless of the results of the on-going peace negotiations, humanitarian needs will remain high and therefore ECHO will maintain its engagement in 2004 in order to assist the most vulnerable and needy population. A multi-sectoral approach (health, nutrition, water and sanitation, food security) focusing on ECHO's core mandate will be the main objective. Potential resumption of formal co-operation may open the door for improving implementation of the LRRD policy. Finally, whenever possible, a number of relevant crosscutting sectors such as child protection, gender issues and HIV/AIDS will be reinforced.

Operations for the forgotten crises in **Somalia** and **Northern Uganda** will retain their profile (mainly health, nutrition, water, sanitation) as long as there is little prospect of a rapid solution to the internal conflicts, which have precipitated the humanitarian suffering. Following the stress created by the drought of 2002 and 2003 on the already vulnerable populations of **Ethiopia** and **Eritrea**, ECHO will continue to address acute needs as well as to co-ordinate with other services for an effective Commission LRRD and DPP response to consolidate the emergency drought relief assistance. In **Kenya**, following the phase out in 2003 of ECHO's emergency and post-emergency drought response, the situation will be monitored carefully to ensure appropriate application of Commission DPP and LRRD policy.

In **West Africa** the Office will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Guinea. A regional approach for Coastal West Africa will be taken in order to keep the maximum flexibility to respond to this regional crisis.

The general security situation in **Sierra Leone** has further improved in 2003. This, added to the successful implementation of an LRRD approach, should allow ECHO to significantly reduce its financial contribution and its phase out by the end of 2004. In **Guinea**, ECHO intends to focus its support to the camps in Nzérékoré, which still request emergency aid.

Humanitarian assistance will mainly focus on **Liberia** as the humanitarian situation has deteriorated drastically. Large parts of the population have been displaced by fighting and basic services are practically non-existent. The whole scope of the humanitarian crisis cannot yet be fully assessed due to the lack of access in most parts of the country.

In **Côte d'Ivoire** some positive progress has been made at political level in launching the implementation of the Marcoussis Agreement, however, the situation remains very volatile. The country is still divided between government forces and the "forces nouvelles" (former rebels). Public services are not available in large parts of the country.

A major task in the West Africa region is to be able to respond promptly to the continuing waves of population movements, internally and cross-border. Operations will concentrate on health (mainly Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire), nutrition (mainly Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire) as well as on water and sanitation (mainly Sierra Leone and Guinea) based on a detailed assessment of the needs in each of the countries concerned. Protection activities and support to the co-ordination of humanitarian assistance covering the whole region will also play an important role in the 2004 regional Global Plan.

In the Great Lakes Region of **Central Africa**, 2003 has seen genuine but as yet inconclusive progress in the various regional peace processes. In **Burundi**, while the handover from a Tutsi to a Hutu President went ahead as planned in May 2003, the situation has remained tense, with dissident rebel factions remaining outside the national process. Periodic outbursts of violence continue to destabilise parts of the country, causing displacement and hardship. ECHO will follow a multisectoral strategy (health, nutrition, food security, water) to be in a position to quickly respond to humanitarian needs as they arise during the year.

In the **Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**, a transitional government of national unity is now in place. Following the success of the EU-led Artemis force in stabilising Bunia - an UN contingent deployed in greater numbers and with a new mandate in Ituri and the Greater Kivu region. However, despite the positive overall trend on the political front, the violence continues in the eastern provinces. DRC is estimated to have one of the highest child mortality rate in the world (205 per 1000 live birth), and currently occupies first place in ECHO's global needs assessment. The deterioration of social (particularly health) services has led to a spiralling of mortality rates from common diseases, while the systematic practice of rape in the conflict areas has led to a rapid advance of HIV/AIDS. The year 2004 will be a watershed for the Congo and the wider region. Humanitarian assistance will be more important than ever, not only in order to meet ongoing urgent needs in conflict and post-conflict situations, but also to properly contribute to the stabilisation process. The main geographical focus will continue to be the Greater Kivu and Ituri areas, and the recently accessible areas of the former frontline. Funding will be directed to the following main sectors: health (detection and containment of major epidemics, basic healthcare), food and nutrition (containment and reduction of acute malnutrition rates), IDPs and returnees (emergency relief for newly displaced families and integrated assistance for their resettlement) as well as special mandates (support for international agencies for protection and co-ordination activities).

Meanwhile, **Tanzania** continues to provide a haven for nearly half a million refugees (approximately one third Congolese and two thirds Burundian, the vast majority of them from areas that are still too unstable to countenance repatriation). With government restrictions increasing and international donor support dwindling (leading to frequent food ration cuts), continued support for the Tanzania refugee programme will be crucial. A handing over of the food aid assistance to the refugees from the humanitarian to the food security budget line is planned for 2004.

Despite the signs of a return to normality after a turbulent 2003, further humanitarian operations may also be necessary on a smaller scale in other countries of the region, notably in the **Republic of Congo** (Brazzaville) and the **Central African Republic**, where ECHO will continue to monitor the situation closely. ECHO will undertake a global evaluation of past Caribbean **DIPECHO** interventions. Depending on the outcome of this evaluation, a new Action Plan may be established.

Newly Independent States (NIS) and Mongolia

In the **NIS** ECHO will continue to respond to the humanitarian needs caused by the **Chechnya** conflict. Humanitarian needs remain high as the civilian population remains the main victim of the conflict characterised by widespread violations of human rights and humanitarian law. In Chechnya, health care and water are barely functioning and many people face severe problems in obtaining food. Outside Chechnya, the situation of IDPs in **Ingushetia** and **Daghestan** remains precarious, with very little attention from the international community.

Depending on the conditions of access and security, ECHO will try to meet the basic needs of IDPs and the most vulnerable population in Chechnya as well as in the neighbouring republics, Ingushetia and Dagestan. Operations will include food,

medical care (with a focus on mother and child healthcare and support to children hospitals in Chechnya.), shelter, water and sanitation, protection, mine awareness activities and psycho-social projects. The scope of the assistance will depend on the way the conflict and thus the humanitarian needs develop. In order to improve the monitoring of its assistance, ECHO continues to plan to open an office in Nazran, which has not been possible in 2003 because of the Russian authorities' attitude.

ECHO will maintain its presence in **Georgia**, where the humanitarian situation is not likely to improve in the short term. The Office will have phased out of Armenia in 2004 following a last decision in 2003. It is no longer present in Azerbaidjan, but in view of continuing difficult conditions for many refugees there, a renewed assessment of the situation will be carried out.

2004 will be the first year of a three-year phasing-out plan for **Tajikistan**, now that the immediate impacts of drought and war have diminished. TACIS will become more active in 2004 and so ECHO operations will be designed with LRRD in mind. Humanitarian funding is likely to be split roughly equally between the water and sanitation, food, and health sectors, which means that a greater proportion of the funds will be going to water and sanitation activities than in previous years.

Unless there is another winter disaster with major humanitarian consequences, ECHO will not support relief activities in Mongolia in 2004. It will, however, examine the possibility of funding disaster preparedness, as Mongolia is a country prone to disasters.

Mediterranean Countries and Middle East

The general objective of the Office's strategy for the region is to contribute to prevent a further worsening of the living conditions of vulnerable Palestinian refugees and residents, especially those in refugee camps, in sealed off, isolated and remote areas.

The humanitarian situation in the **Occupied Palestinian Territories** continues to deteriorate at a pace that is well beyond the response capacity of the international community. The ongoing construction of the so-called "Separation Wall" in the West Bank further worsens a dramatic situation, deepens the vulnerability of the population, and increases difficulties and costs for providers of humanitarian relief. ECHO will continue to respond by targeting the key sectors of water and sanitation, health, food, income generation, protection, psychosocial support, advocacy and co-ordination, and shelter rehabilitation. Given their vulnerability, children will continue to be a priority target group.

An estimated 430.000 or more Palestinian refugees in **Lebanon** remain a forgotten group within a visible crisis. The precariousness of their living conditions is exacerbated by both the distant perspective of a solution for the Palestinian issue as a whole, including the question of where they will ultimately reside, and the policy applied by the Lebanese authorities towards them. Assistance to Palestinian refugees in Lebanon will continue in the key sectors of water and sanitation, income generation, health and psychosocial support, shelter rehabilitation.

Humanitarian needs of some 1.700.000 and 410.000 Palestinian refugees in, respectively, Jordan and Syria, do not require a specific humanitarian response at

this stage. However, considering the unpredictable evolution of the political dynamics in the Middle East, they remain a group of concern.

The situation of **Sahrawi refugees** continues to be a forgotten crisis, in particular due to donor fatigue and little international attention. A political solution to the conflict is still uncertain. The scope of ECHO's support will be closely linked to the progress made in the improvement of the management of operations by its partners in the region following a series of measures already taken or planned for 2004 in order to strengthen the monitoring of the distribution of humanitarian goods.. Following the 2003 earthquake in **Algeria** (Boumerdes), the situation will be closely monitored. Depending on the evolution of the situation, a decision might be required in 2004 to cover remaining needs, in particular in the health sector.

There are many uncovered humanitarian needs in **Yemen**, partly due to the lack of international assistance. These needs can be considered as forgotten in view of the low interest shown by most donors. This is particularly true for the water and health sectors in the most remote areas, the main targets in 2004.

Following the successful extension of the **DIPECHO** programme to Central Asia in 2003, a second Action Plan for Central Asia will be launched focusing again on Tajikistan and to a lesser extent Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

Asia and Latin America

The two most important theatres of humanitarian operations in Asia will remain **Iraq** and **Afghanistan**, both countries appearing in the high needs category of ECHO's 2004 global needs assessment. In both countries the security situation significantly deteriorated in the second half of 2003 and activities in the areas of most acute needs are seriously constrained by access difficulties. Security will continue to be a vital issue in both countries.

In **Iraq** the key sectors in the post-war recovery phase will probably continue to be health and water/sanitation, but ECHO's support may also be provided to other sectors such as school rehabilitation, IDPs, and mine related activities.

The Office will also continue to closely work with the other Commission Services engaged in the reconstruction process, in order to ensure a proper linkage between humanitarian activities and the development process in **Afghanistan**, where the inflow of refugees has now slowed down from the massive return levels of 2002. The main sectors will be livelihood support and water, mainly in the South where the effects of the 5-year drought are still being felt. There will also be a significant level of protection activities, both for returnees and detainees in Afghanistan and for Afghan refugees remaining in **Pakistan** and **Iran**. Furthermore, a comprehensive survey will be undertaken of the overall humanitarian situation in Pakistan.

Forgotten needs will continue to play an important role in ECHO's humanitarian operations in the rest of Asia. First of all, **North Korea** has massive humanitarian needs but, despite its high political profile, there is a serious lack of donor attention. Activities will continue to be centred on the health sector and will aim to introduce more partners and extend the geographical scope of operations. Secondly, in **Nepal** food aid will once again be given to the Bhutanese refugees stranded in the camps on the border, as they have no other means of sustenance. Healthcare and protection activities will also target populations affected by the long-running Maoist rebellion

– here again relatively few donors are involved. Thirdly, the humanitarian situation in **Burma/Myanmar** continues to give serious cause for concern, all the more so as it is impossible to access large parts of the country, especially in the borders with Thailand and China, homeland to most of the very vulnerable ethnic minorities, because of government restrictions. Activities here will be focused on health, nutrition and protection, and help will continue to be given to Burmese refugees in the camps in **Thailand**.

In South Asia, operations in **India** will be in favour of the victims of major natural disasters. These will continue to respond to the forgotten needs of vulnerable people affected by violent political conflicts, including those affected by the situation in Jammu and Kashmir where ECHO appears to be the only significant donor. The strategy for **Sri Lanka** will depend on the progress of the peace initiative. If this continues on a positive course, resettlement assistance will be given to returning IDPs and refugees. However, any resumption of the conflict will see aid focused on Jaffna, which would be cut off once again, and on war zones depending on the security situation. In **Bangladesh** ECHO will only act if there are very serious and widespread floods or other natural catastrophes.

In South-East Asia ECHO will continue the process of gradual phase-out from **Cambodia and Laos**, with a progressive handover to longer term instruments . In **Indonesia** and the **Philippines**, assistance will be given to IDPs in relation to displacement and resettlement in conflict areas, where local coping capacities are not adequate. Activities will also be spread throughout the region, including in **Vietnam** and **East Timor**, in case of any major natural disaster, especially floods. In **China** too, response will focus on major natural disasters only, usually in the more remote areas such as Tibet or Xinjiang.

In **Latin America, Colombia** will once again be the main sphere of operation, with the focus on helping IDPs to survive and become established in their new situations during the first year after their displacement.

Now that the nutritional situation in **Central American** countries has shown signs of improvement, operations will only take place in response to natural disasters where indigenous capacity is unable to cope.

With regard to the **DIPECHO** programme, Action Plans will be established in 2004 for Central America and South-East Asia, with the accent on very specific needs in the fields of preparedness and small-scale mitigation, identified through an evaluation of previous Action Plans. Also priority will be given to establishing links with risk reduction activities

7. PRIORITIES RELATED TO PARTNERS

2004 will be the first year of implementation of a renewed legal and financial framework for ECHO's relation with its different families of partners (UN agencies, international organisations and NGO's). These frameworks focus no longer on the control of inputs but on the definition of clear objectives and indicators to better measure and assess the performance of operations financed by the Office.

After the entry into force of the European Communities new Financial Regulation and its Implementing Rules in January 2003, the Financial and Administrative Agreement between the European Community and the United Nations (FAFA) was signed on 29 April 2003 and is applied to all contribution-specific agreements between the Commission and UN agencies.

The new Framework Partnership Agreements (hereafter 'FPAs') with NGOs and with International Organisations (i.e. covering International Organisations which are not party to the FAFA, like ICRC or IFRC) have been finalised and will enter into force on 1 January 2004.

Existing FPAs with NGOs have not been automatically renewed. All former NGO partners who wanted to sign the new FPA had to undergo a selection procedure based on quality criteria as laid down in the Commission's new Financial Regulation. This process will be applied as from 1.1.2004 to all new requests for partnership.

Training of partners' personnel will be a key issue in 2004 to provide for a smooth transition as possible from the existing to the new legal framework. In this respect, a complete training program, covering headquarters and field level, will be carried out during the first half of 2004. Training material designed for distance learning will be distributed to all interested NGOs. ECHO also intends to support initiatives by partners themselves for developing training materials and organising seminars. To this end, a call for proposals will be published in order to select suitable projects.

The selection procedure mentioned above should allow the Office to establish a network of quality partners to implement humanitarian aid operations.

In terms of **audits**, ECHO will continue to use an established practice of auditing completed projects at partners' headquarters on a two-year cycle. The focus on the validation of the costs and on the review of the adequacy of partners' financial systems will be continued. As the number of completed audits grows, a new task of reviewing the actions taken by partners on previous audit recommendations will begin to develop. The on-going projects in the field will also continue to be audited, with the audit selection primarily based on the risk and size profile of the partner. To ensure that the audit process remains up-to-date the audit methodology will be further refined, making an effective use of both internal and external audit resources.

8. OTHER HORIZONTAL ISSUES AND PRIORITIES

Thematic funding: On a limited scale, ECHO will continue to implement also a thematic approach to funding, in order to support the special mandates of specific partners. The condition will be that thematic contributions achieve a value-added for meeting humanitarian needs and strengthening response capacities of the humanitarian community, including staff security. In 2002/2003, ECHO has already supported UNHCR in the implementation of its core mandate, refugee protection, by funding UNHCR protection, security and registration operations. These funds allowed UNHCR to develop a software tool for the unified registration of refugees, which will be implemented in 20 countries in 2004. Support for additional thematic activities is being considered in 2004, including, possibly,

children's rights and improving co-ordination mechanisms for humanitarian operations.

Evaluation: As in 2003, ECHO's evaluation programme will be synchronised with the management of humanitarian operations, maintaining its threefold focus: **country operations** (global plans, decisions and operation contracts); **partners** (e.g. MSF); and **thematic issues** (e.g. water, children, gender, etc). However, particularly in the choice of thematic studies and matters chosen for joint evaluation efforts with certain EU Member States, ECHO's annual evaluation plan will show a stronger link to ECHO's strategic programming cycle in order to better assess its activities in relation to strategic objectives. To further assist this linkage the programme for evaluations will have a perspective of more than one calendar year ahead. Additional focus is now also to be given to the use of evaluations, studies and reviews to create methodologies, guides and tools that can be used to assist ECHO's partners in their attempt to build technical capacity.

Information and communication strategy: Information activities during 2004 will focus on communicating the values, principles and concrete achievements of EU humanitarian aid, with a particular emphasis on the need to maintain a "humanitarian space" during crises and to preserve the dignity of populations in extreme humanitarian situations.

The strategy will be guided by four essential orientations: it will target information multipliers such as opinion leaders in EU and acceding countries, young people or the media; it will focus on few but essential key messages; it will develop a wider information reflex by moving from mere visibility actions to an active promotion of humanitarian principles and values; and, finally, it will apply a rigorous cost-efficiency approach, using available resources to the maximum possible effect. This entails - *inter alia* - a wider use of high impact information tools such as audiovisual productions and the internet.

Improving reporting systems and IT environment: ECHO's performance-based approach pursued - *inter alia* - with the new FPA will be backed up by an adaptation of its existing reporting tools and IT systems. The effective monitoring of funded operations depends to a large degree on the inputs provided by the field offices. It is thus crucial that field reporting allows ECHO to monitor the achievement of its objectives and the measure the impact of humanitarian aid operations. Therefore, new reporting guidelines will be used by its experts in the field, which should facilitate the implementation and monitoring of the annual aid strategy, the monitoring of funding decisions and the assessment of partners' operations.

Within the context of HOLIS ("Humanitarian Office Local Information System"), ECHO's multi-annual programme to upgrade its information technology (IT) environment, the workprogramme for 2004 will focus on the development of a software application for the new project appraisal worksheet ("FichOp 2G"). A prototype will be available by end 2004. This also includes necessary adaptations of local informations systems to changes foreseen in the Commission financial applications (e.g. SINCOM III and CRIS).

Security of relief workers: Improving the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and protection of ECHO personnel will remain a key theme in 2004. The

Office will continue its efforts to strengthen its own security management system at headquarters and in the field through improved co-ordination and collaboration on security issues with appropriate humanitarian partners. Partners' security mechanisms will also be strengthened. Several initiatives on training and equipment will be undertaken. In particular, ECHO will continue to fund security items (e.g. VHF radios) within regular contracts. It will also provide increased support for specific security related projects and studies with appropriate partners.

ECHO will closely follow and support the work of the UN Agencies in relation to the steps it takes to ensure the protection of United Nations personnel, associated personnel and humanitarian personnel working in conflict zones, as called for in the recent UN Security Council Resolution 1502 (2003). It will continue to play an advocacy role in favour of the philosophy on which this document is based, in particular that humanitarian assistance must remain neutral to avoid being taken hostage by political considerations and jeopardising the security of humanitarian aid workers.

9. CONCLUSION

ECHO will remain engaged in a policy of strictly adhering to the fundamental principles and values of humanitarian assistance, namely neutrality, impartiality and independence. It is convinced that strict adherence to those principles is more important than ever because of worrying trends, both in an institutional context where certain political forces tend to regard humanitarian aid as an instrument of foreign policy or crisis management, and in the increasingly dangerous reality in the field where humanitarian organisations themselves become targets of warring factions.

For ECHO, the best way to preserve the "humanitarian space" is to maintain a high level of engagement in the good donorship principles, (i.e. to provide assistance on the basis of needs, not on the basis of political considerations), to remain committed to high quality assistance and to maintain a transparent dialogue with other key players, both bilaterally and in multilateral humanitarian fora.

The experience of recent crises in Afghanistan, the Middle East and Iraq demonstrates that the above principles are key requirements for the effective delivery of aid, for maintaining access to the populations in need, and for safeguarding the lives and security of humanitarian personnel.

While looking for appropriate and relevant information sharing mechanisms, politico-military crisis management activities should be kept strictly separated from purely humanitarian operations. Respect of International humanitarian law by all parties involved, including donors, remains a cornerstone of humanitarian assistance, which continues to be too often the only lifeline for millions of desperate people.