

1996

ECHO
ANNUAL
REVIEW

EUROPEAN UNION



ACTION IN

HUMANITARIAN AID

Return to Rwanda

"Violations of basic humanitarian principles such as those we witnessed in Zaire last year cannot be tolerated, and we in Europe have a duty to take the lead in sounding the alarm when need be"

*Emma Bonino
European Commissioner for humanitarian aid*

ECHO



European Community
Humanitarian Office

ECHO ANNUAL REVIEW

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European Commissioner for humanitarian aid*



Cover photo: Photonews



European Community Humanitarian Office



A chilling year



photo ECHO

*By Emma Bonino
European Commissioner for humanitarian aid*

After two years in charge of the European Union's efforts in humanitarian action, I have to say that the year 1996 ended with great disappointments. As we all know, a new crisis erupted in the Great Lakes region of Africa. Zairean rebel activity in the east of the country triggered the return of about 700,000 Rwandans to their villages after two years in refugee camps. And that was that in the minds of many — Rwandan refugee problem solved. But some refugees, up to 500,000 of them, were stranded deep in the interior of Zaire, and there was no way to reach them. The international community stood by while fundamental humanitarian principles — the right to access in such cases — were violated. That is still the case as I write, shortly after a mission to the region.

As European Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs, it is very obvious to me that what we do via the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) is not simply a financial and administrative operation. We are not mere bankers funding humanitarian organisations. We cannot quantify the value of what we do by conventional accounting methods — we are in this business because we uphold universal humanitarian values, not because we in Europe stand to gain in any material way. Though we cannot solve political crises, neither can we stand by and watch people die for the lack of basic necessities. Violations of basic humanitarian principles such as those we witnessed in Zaire last year cannot be tolerated, and we in Europe have a duty to take the lead in sounding the alarm when need be.

The year was a chilling one for another reason — evidence of new dangers facing humanitarian professionals today. Flying the Red Cross flag is no guarantee of safety today. For forces determined to create chaos and to expose civilians to untold hardship, humanitarian workers are targets too. In Chechnya, six International Committee of the Red Cross workers were murdered in their beds. We pay tribute to them, and to the eight aid and human rights workers who have died in Rwanda since then. It takes more courage than ever to become a humanitarian aid worker.

In the course of missions to the field last year, I became very aware that disasters, whether natural catastrophes or wars, are not levellers among human beings. Some groups of people are more vulnerable than others. In Afghanistan, a hardline regime banned women from work outside the home. For thousands of widows, that meant the loss of their livelihoods. Elsewhere, refugee populations are overwhelmingly female. The key to reviving societies thrown into such chaos is to look after the women, who will look after everyone else and re-weave the threads of a community. This we saw in Tuzla, where the widows of Srebrenica marked the anniversary of the massacre of their men with a message of conciliation and commitment to survival. Improving systems for fine-tuning ECHO aid so that it truly meets the needs of those in crisis is a major priority.

No peace without justice

The year 1996 was not without its achievements. In the former Yugoslavia, the war is over, but ECHO is still massively involved in providing aid to survivors who need a helping hand to resume normal lives. If the peace process stays on track, and the signs are that it will, ECHO will be able to withdraw over the year ahead. Reconstruction will be the order of the day.

Still, there can be no real peace in Yugoslavia without justice. The same goes for Rwanda, and for any country in which civilians have experienced crimes against humanity. That is why I am backing the international campaign to set up a permanent, international court of justice by the year 2000. Bringing criminals to justice would be part of its role, enabling reconciliation after conflicts, and even contributing to prevention.

As for the year ahead, the omens elsewhere are not good. Africa in particular is the cause of deep concern, eclipsing other crises in the public eye as I write. To continue its work, ECHO needs the support of the European public. Raising awareness of the issues at stake is, I believe, an important part of our work. Only with public support can we carry out our mission of meeting the needs of victims in emergencies, whether or not they happen to be in the headlines.



If aid workers are under threat, so is the whole of humanitarian action

By Alberto Navarro

Founded in 1992, ECHO has now been a key player in humanitarian action for almost five years. Emergency and reconstruction aid has been distributed to areas of crisis in almost 60 countries across the globe amounting to over \$3 billion in humanitarian aid. It goes without saying that none of this would be possible without ECHO's partnership with the scores of NGO's, Red Cross family and UN agencies who ensure that aid reaches those who need it most.

1996 has been marked by closer cooperation with the bilateral humanitarian operations of member states. A Council of Ministers regulation has instituted an 'Aid Committee' establishing for the first time an EU forum exclusively devoted to issues of humanitarian aid. In light of our experience we have also begun to revise the Framework Partnership Agreement to introduce greater flexibility in the operational contracts governing our activities with partners in the field, while maintaining the need for accountability.

Looking at our worldwide operations, the improvements in trouble-spots such as the former Yugoslavia and Chechnya, have led to a marginal decrease in the total level of assistance provided in comparison to 1995 (ECU 656 million against ECU 692 million). Nevertheless, the situation in the Great Lakes region of Africa remains critical and threatens to cause difficulties extending further into Zaire which may require additional humanitarian aid. In Afghanistan, the warring factions continue to worsen the plight of refugees fleeing the conflict whilst inflicting untold misery on the population as a whole. Regrettably, the forgotten conflicts of southern Sudan, the Caucasus, Liberia and Angola, to name but a few, are still very much cause for concern.

Over half our funding in 1996 went to NGO's. The International Committee of the Red Cross, the Federation of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent remain our major partners in this respect. One quarter of the total funding went to UN relief agencies such as the High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Food Programme for operations in the Great Lakes region and former Yugoslavia. In those areas where we can move from emergency operations to rehabilitation and development, ECHO is setting-up task forces which liaise closely with the relevant European Commission Directorates-General in order to develop strategies which link these respective stages. Haiti and Angola are just two examples of places where we are beginning to implement this approach already.

ECHO has used the opportunities provided by the Presidency semesters to focus attention on humanitarian issues and engage in awareness and advocacy campaigns, jointly with NGO's. We have created an annual TV and Radio award which was presented for the first time in Dublin, in December 1996, by President Mary Robinson of Ireland. The award is designed to encourage the audio-visual media to analyse in-depth the issues related to humanitarian action.

Intolerable demands

The 1996 Annual Review has a special emphasis this year on the activities of those engaged in administering aid in the frontline of operations. In addition to the 115 staff at its Brussels base, ECHO has 70 aid experts coordinating the operations we finance through different organisations in various parts of the world. In the following pages we have asked these experts to give a first-hand account of the challenges they encounter whilst working in the field. In doing this, it is our hope to bring home the difficult and at times dangerous conditions that ECHO and our partners

are called upon to alleviate. Aid workers in certain parts of the world have faced intolerable demands and great insecurity, particularly in the Great Lakes region. Staff operating in this region have been prevented from rendering urgent humanitarian assistance to thousands of refugees facing miserable conditions in the camps. Furthermore, regional staff from a partner organisation have lost their lives in the course of carrying out their duties. If aid workers are under threat the whole humanitarian action could be put in question.

If we began the year with a sense of optimism, sadly the sense of relief has only been short-lived. The troubles of Zaire, Afghanistan and Burma are looming on the horizon. However ECHO has been enriched and strengthened by the new structures it has acquired and is ready to face future demands in the humanitarian field. With the benefit of these past years' experience, ECHO can now look forward to administering aid more effectively and more efficiently together with its counterparts in the Member States and with aid agencies throughout the world.



photo J.VARGAS

About ECHO



photo S. QUINTIN

The European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) is part of the European Commission. It was set up in 1992 to oversee and coordinate the European Union's humanitarian operations in non-member countries. In four years, ECHO has become a giant on the world humanitarian aid stage, accounting for a quarter of all international assistance. This figure rises to over 50 percent for the Union as a whole when Member State contributions are added in.

In 1996, ECHO went into over 60 countries to help the victims of natural disasters or wars. Humanitarian aid is granted unconditionally, irrespective of race, ethnicity or religion. The type of assistance provided can vary greatly, ranging from food, clothing, shelter and medicines, water supplies, war surgery, emergency repair work and vaccinations through to transport counselling, air lifts, prevention and mine clearance. ECHO also manages a disaster preparedness programme in high-risk areas of the world.

Working with partners in the field

ECHO works in partnership with non-governmental organizations, UN agencies and other international bodies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross. It has also concluded framework agreements with a substantial number of relief organizations to speed formalities up. But ECHO does more than give its partners financial support. Its evaluation work keeps them constantly up to the mark, in search of greater operational efficiency. It encourages its partners to exchange information, think about the aims of humanitarian aid and study ways of delivering it. ECHO also helps train those working in the field; a special master's degree is now available at seven European universities.

Speed and effectiveness

ECHO, which is under the direct supervision of Commissioner Emma Bonino, can push decisions through in a matter of hours as a result of greatly simplified procedures, which open the way for swift and flexible responses to emergencies wherever they occur.

1996 annual review: factual information and personal accounts

In this review, you will find factual articles side by side with more personal narratives, giving a vivid picture of ECHO's operations and the challenges facing humanitarian aid volunteers. The field reports are mainly from ECHO coordinators, present in countries where ECHO is supporting major aid programmes.



photo V. DUBUS



photo ECHO



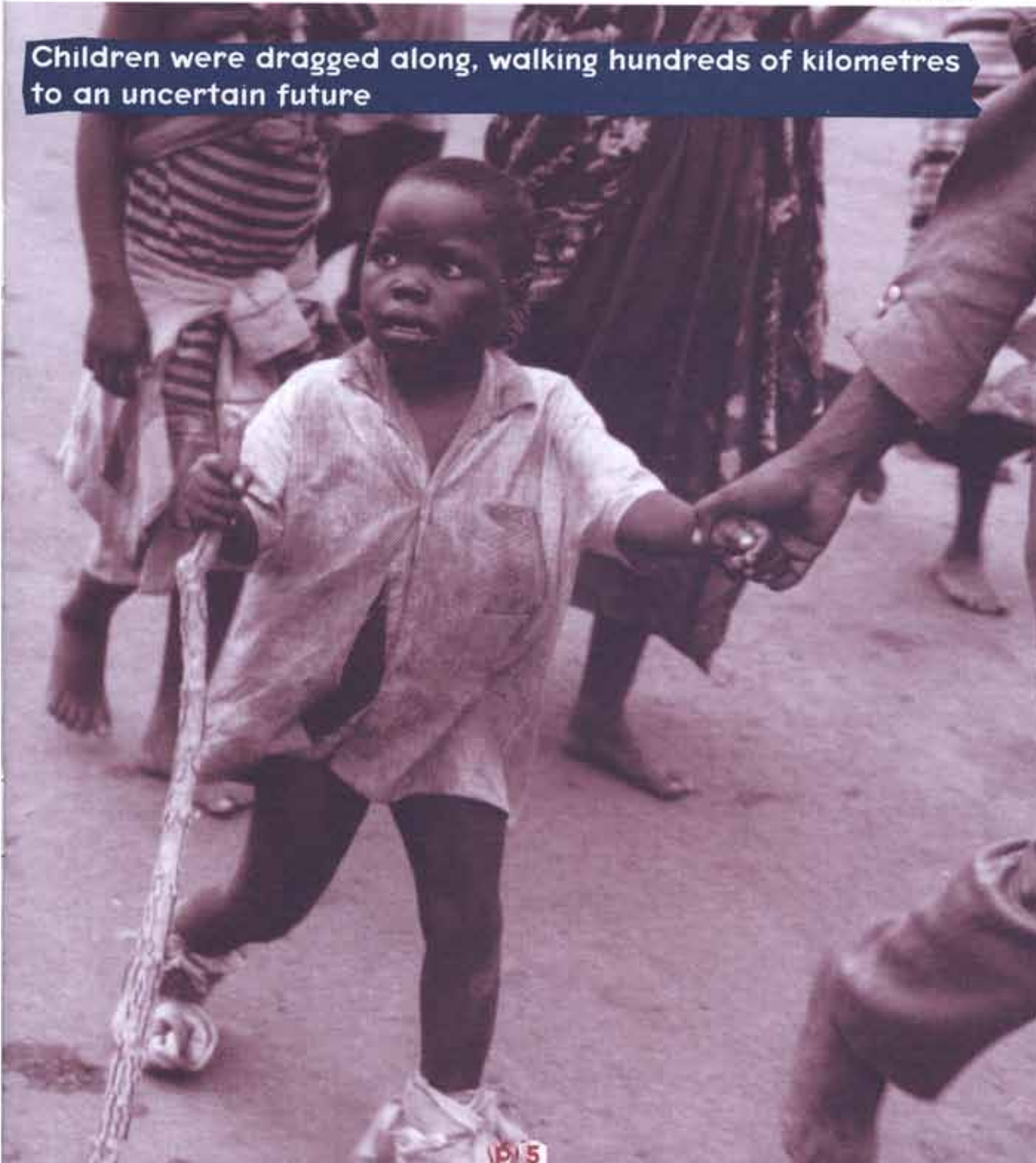
photo ICRC

Return to Rwanda

The sudden return of over a million Rwandan refugees at the end of the year swelled the country's population by 21 per cent. While the repatriation itself was accomplished without any major incidents, thanks to the massive deployment of human and logistical resources, the country now faces a host of political, social and economic challenges. In the first few months of 1997, ECHO intends to concentrate on primary needs such as food, health care and housing, to facilitate the reintegration process and help ease the inevitable social tensions.

photo J. VARGAS

Children were dragged along, walking hundreds of kilometres to an uncertain future



Zaire: no access to victims

Getting help to refugees who remained in Zaire has been by far the most complicated task. Dispersed as they were in groups of varying sizes it initially proved difficult to locate them and estimate their numbers. These problems were compounded by the rapidly changing political and military situation and by access problems caused partly by the lack of security, with continued fighting and restrictions on the movement of humanitarian organizations. With no multinational force available to open up humanitarian corridors and the airdrops option abandoned, it was impossible to make any hard and fast arrangements before the end of the year. ECHO kept all possible logistical options under review with its partners to provide assistance to the constant stream of people fleeing the crisis over the months.

Following the departure of the Rwandan refugees from Tanzania, the UNHCR brought the Burundian refugees in the Ngara region into two camps in an effort to rationalize aid management, consolidated the camps further south and opened a new camp for the ever-increasing influx of Zairean refugees. Tanzania has been the traditional destination for Rwandans and Burundians forced to flee the successive waves of violence which have rocked their countries throughout their history. The situation in Burundi does not bode well for the return of its refugees and ECHO will continue to help the UNHCR and the IFRC care for them in the camps.



Thousands of children got separated from their parents on the way home. This family found a way to stay together

Bathtime: improvising is a way of life in refugee camps

Crisis in the Great Lakes - facts and figures

For over two years, almost two million Rwandan and Burundian refugees found shelter in Burundi, Tanzania and Zaire, assisted by the United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations with considerable financial backing from ECHO.

In 1996 the vast majority of Rwandan refugees (who numbered some 1,750,000 at the beginning of the year) returned to Rwanda following the closure of camps in Burundi and Tanzania and the rebellion in eastern Zaire. Almost 90,000 refugees returned from Burundi, 700,000 from Zaire and 485,000 from Tanzania, i.e. 1,275,000 in total. The vast majority of refugees who did not return to Rwanda stayed in Zaire - no more than 30,000 or so remained in Tanzania.

The number of Burundian refugees in the region (some 260,000 at the beginning of the year) has remained more or less stable despite the repatriation of some 60,000 Burundians who had taken refuge in Zaire between the end of October and the end of the year: those who left were "replaced" by a similar number who arrived in Tanzania via Kibondo to escape the fighting between the Zairean army and rebel forces. Though 90,000 Burundian refugees were still thought to be in Zaire at the end of the year, the vast majority were in Tanzania.

In November and December, 35,000 Zaireans fleeing the fighting in South Kivu arrived in Kigoma in Tanzania (at the southern tip of Burundi) via Lake Tanganyika.

Burundi sinks into chaos

In Burundi, where the civilian population is now feeling the effects of an embargo, extremist tendencies are mounting and clashes between the army and the militia are commonplace. It has become very difficult to assist displaced and scattered inhabitants, because of the security risks which affect even humanitarian aid workers - three ICRC delegates were murdered in June in the course of an attack which took place on a road in the Cibitoke province in the north-west of the country, and the ICRC suspended its activities pending clarification of the circumstances. At the end of the year the inquiry had still not reached a conclusion, preventing the resumption of assistance in this isolated region.

Aid since 1993

Since the assassination of the Burundian President, Melchior Ndadaye, in 1993 and the ethnic massacres which ensued, ECHO has done its utmost to respond to the needs of refugees, displaced persons and returnees, and to bring help to the countries affected by the crisis

in the region. It has proved difficult to implement Commission financial assistance because of the complex interweaving of military, political and humanitarian factors and the constantly changing state of affairs.

ECHO has provided ECU 560.86 million in humanitarian assistance since the end of 1993, including two allocations approved in November and December 1996 to the tune of almost ECU 169 million. Those decisions provided for logistical support to make it easier to reach Rwandan and Burundian refugees and displaced Zaireans in the east of Zaire, assistance with running and improving the infrastructure of Burundian refugee camps and help to set up a new camp for Zairean refugees in Tanzania. They also include resettlement and reintegration programmes to help Rwandans return to their place of origin.

Real people, real problems, real solutions

from ECHO's correspondent in Rwanda



photo J. VARGAS

On the road back to Rwanda

Sweat dripping into my eyes, I straightened up and placed a well-aimed kick at the jack which had somehow lodged itself beneath the crazily tilted car in such a way that neither the car nor the jack would move. The new wheel, the second that morning and my last spare, lay in the crimson laterite dust at my feet. The white Discovery with its distinctive ECHO markings was plastered with the same dust and was recognisable no more. Not for the first time I found myself alone with Jean, my Zairean driver, looking out over a deeply green and verdant valley in northern Rwanda stuck on a dusty track with no help for miles around. Cracked transmissions on the HF Codan radio and my muted curses were the only sounds to punctuate the silence as I stepped back to survey the scene. Without warning, a crash of thunder sounded overhead through the gently swaying Eucalyptus branches and day turned to night. For ten minutes we sheltered under a nearby banana tree and watched torrential tropical rain wash the car clean. Equally suddenly, the rain stopped and was replaced by bright sunlight shafting through the steaming shadows. The rainy season had arrived.

As everywhere in this, the most densely populated country in Africa, Jean and I had not been alone at all. Sheltering in the same banana plantation as ourselves but unseen and unheard had been at least 20 other people. These were Rwandan Hutu peasant hill farmers, so obvious in their gaily coloured 'kitenge' and with their ubiquitous hoes dangling from their calloused hands. On their heads were balanced old food-aid sacks, one or two with the ECHO logo

dimly visible through the grime, but now filled with sweet potatoes. They were all women. Most had babies wrapped tightly against their backs with slightly older children peeking out from behind their legs. Slowly they came towards the car. Our predicament was obvious to them, so, without a word, they put down their bundles and bodily lifted the two-ton car, holding it suspended while Jean quickly changed wheels. I marveled at their strength and in the grinning throng afterwards I lifted one of the bundles onto the head of a laughing five-year-old girl. It was at least 15 kilos in weight.

A white man, doing women's work

Wondering what it must be like to walk for miles every day with such a weight balanced precariously on my head, I decided to find out. Amid much hilarity, one old woman actually doubled up on the road-side with mirth, I placed the round of twisted banana leaf on my head, lifted up a jerry-can full of water and set off down the track. Like the piper I emerged from the wood some minutes later with a sore neck and a band of Rwandan peasants that had miraculously swelled to at least one hundred people in the few short minutes I had been walking. Enough was enough, I had now become the biggest joke in the valley. A "Muzungu", a white man, doing women's work. This was too much.

Jean caught up with me in the car and began to translate my questions into rapid Kinyarwanda. As I suspected, these people had recently returned from more than two years in the refugee camps of Tanzania, some 200 kms to the South. You could tell because almost everything they had was aid in one form or another. The hoes were probably donated by the EC. The sacks had once contained EC food-aid. The jerry-can I had carried was from UNHCR. And the temporary shelter they now lived in was covered in ECHO-marked white plastic sheeting.

These people were, in fact, the people I had come from Kigali, Rwanda's capital and ECHO's base, to see. I had spent Christmas day handing out high protein biscuits as they continued their long and weary march home, and now here they were at home. But their original homes had been destroyed, either during the genocide or by the weather during their absence, and I was here to assess whether or not an NGO should build them new houses with ECHO money.

As we left these happy yet wary people on the hill-side, dependent still on food-aid, with clean water from a newly rehabilitated spring, with minimal but adequate shelter and with medical help not far back up the track, all of which ECHO had funded, I reflected on the breadth and depth of what I did for a living: One day handing out high protein biscuits, the next day debating what type of houses to build or rehabilitate with local authorities; one day discussing food-security programmes with my Commission (DGVIII) counterparts, the next evaluating gravity-fed water systems with one of our NGO partners.

Real people, real problems. With ECHO offering real solutions.

In 1996, ECHO granted ECU 169 million in aid for the Great Lakes region.

Towards No peace of mind or heart

from ECHO's correspondent in Sarajevo

The year 1996 was the first without war in Bosnia and Herzegovina since 1992. The abrupt and insistent sounds of war ceased. Check points were dismantled, roads opened, and one could finally travel throughout the country. Places which previously took 24 hours to reach were now just a couple of hours away.

In Sarajevo, families gained the confidence to remove the sandbags or planks which had protected their houses. And, at last, people started to rebuild their shattered lives. Day-to-day reality for the country's native population remained an ongoing struggle. Bosnians still cannot travel freely across their land, and many live either in fear or dependency. Most of them can neither visit, return to or remain in their homes.

Waiting for deliverance

I cannot shut out the faces of the people we encounter every day, full of yearning to go home. They have not regained their lives, and continue to wait for deliverance. The Croat-Muslim Federation, the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the end of war have done little to improve their lives.

Take the 19 year-old Bosnian teenager from Foca (now Srebrenica in the Republika Srpska), a muslim who lived in a collective centre for over four years in the former enclave of Gorazde. Sharing a single room with 22 persons, she finally had to be evacuated to Sarajevo last November because she was suffering from schizophrenia. Her family is still in the centre.

Or take the Bosnian muslims from Jajce (now Bosnian-Croat-controlled) who are stuck in the centres of Federation-controlled Travnik, where the situation is very tense. They once launched a desperate bid to return home, but were stopped by a volley of shots from Jajce's Bosnian-Croat police. Eighty percent of human rights abuses in Bosnia and Herzegovina are committed by the police, often under the auspices of the authorities.



photo S. DU

A soup kitchen in Sarajevo. Without it, many pensioners would have no proper meals

Isolated 'for their own protection'

I do not think I will ever forget a group of elderly Bosnian Serbs who tried to remain in their homes in Bosanska Krupa (Una Sana Canton, Federation). They were placed "for their own protection" in an isolated dwelling, without any of their belongings. Only the top floor of the barn house in which they were living was habitable. Most of the group was condemned to stay on this one floor, as many could not use the fragile ladder that led to the outside.

When one of the men among them died, his corpse remained up there for 10 days. The group had neither the strength to move him, nor did they know where to bury him.

Despite all of this, the Bosnian Serbs maintained both their wish to remain in Bosanska Krupa and their good humour. The women in particular were eager to communicate and grasp hands. The elderly men seemed to chorus these desires. One of the smiling women - wearing a worn-out and torn Chicago Bulls' T-shirt - enthusiastically proceeded to mimic the action of knitting with her hands. She then drew her hands to her face, pressed her fingers against her eyes, and finally burst into tears. She wanted to knit, like normal grandmothers who sit at home and knit for their families, in tranquillity, while time passes by.

In 1996 there was still no peace in Bosnia. Neither of mind nor of heart.



photo UNHCR / LEMONE

People are starting to rebuild their shattered lives

A lifeline during transition

In 1996, Bosnia-Herzegovina began the shift away from reliance on humanitarian aid to reconstruction work. But although things are gradually getting back to normal, the need for humanitarian assistance remains strong. The large number of internally displaced people along with the most needy groups such as the elderly, the disabled and orphans, are still highly dependent on relief. As a result, ECHO is continuing its support for strictly humanitarian operations, including the provision of soup kitchens, food, clothes and toiletries for the worst off. ECHO is also supporting psycho-social projects for those traumatised by four years of fighting.

In order to pave the way for more ambitious, longer-term rebuilding work, ECHO has also been closely liaising with the other parts of the Commission in charge of these operations in its support for projects to build houses, schools and health centres in various parts of the country. The aim is to make the resettlement of refugees and the displaced as smooth as possible. Obviously, the promise of a roof over their heads is not in itself enough to attract families back; the whole economic and social environment needs to be there to enable them to begin afresh. Refugees need new jobs, access to health care and schools for their children. This is why the programmes supported by ECHO and the other parts of the European Commission involved have developed an integrated regional approach so that all the conditions will be there for people to return.

A roof alone is not enough to enable a family to come home and start living a normal life: a stable social and political environment is essential too. A million refugees from former Yugoslavia are still abroad, and another million are still displaced within the country



photo S. DUI



photo UNHCR / LEMOYNE

Garazde: the arrival of the first coaches from Sarajevo was a symbol of hope after months of isolation

Going home? Easier said than done

By ECHO's correspondent in Mostar

Along with the Danish Refugee Council, ECHO is financing the repair of 100 houses in Stolac, near Mostar. As project coordinator, I have witnessed everyday scenes which illustrate the difficulties facing organizations trying to resettle refugees and the displaced. In line with the Dayton Accord, nine Muslim families were due to return to their rebuilt homes on 31 January under UNHCR protection. Unfortunately, the reception they got was antagonistic. In Stolac, a hostile crowd was waiting for the convoy. Stone-throwing, icy looks, cries of hatred: the "spontaneous" reaction of displaced Croats from central Bosnia. The families will head back to Mostar with what little they have. The impressive show of force by Nato-led stabilization force troops did not change much. The coaches carrying the Muslim families were forced to turn back. There are dozens of stories like this one. It will take a lot of time and effort before reconciliation becomes a reality.

ECHO's humanitarian aid for former Yugoslavia totalled ECU 187 million last year, three-quarters of which went to Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Caucasus Operation Survival

from ECHO correspondents in the Caucasus

Can you imagine being old, living in a city where you get just enough to buy 27 loaves of bread or two kilos of meat per month? Or sheltering from minus 20-degree temperatures in a 20-foot container, in a family of seven with a two-year-old child? Alternatively, imagine that you have lost everything, live in a 20 square-metre adobe hut, with your neighbours only 10 metres away and surrounded by deep rain-sodden mud.



photo UNHCR R. REDMOND

The burden of caring for families, the sick and elderly inevitably falls on women

You see this every day in the Transcaucasus: a vast mass of retired people, eking out their lives on pitiful pensions. 'Container people' in North Armenia, still reeling from the terrible destruction of the 1988 earthquake round Spitak and Gumri. Hopeless camps in Azerbaijan, crowded between Barda and Imishli.

That is why ECHO has been granting humanitarian aid to people in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia since 1993. Almost half of ECHO's budget for the area is spent on essential provisions - regular 20kg food parcels to over 100,000 elderly people living without other support, to Azerbaijani camps run by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, or to soup canteens in Abkhazia.

Just flour, oil and sugar

There are no feasts: just wheat flour, so people can make enough bread to live on, vegetable oil, for essential proteins, and sugar to put in their tea. The sugar is also mixed with garden produce to make jam, a rich source of vitamins.

People also need medical treatment. But earning an average salary of \$50, scarcely enough to pay for food, the region's inhabitants simply cannot afford it. With virtually no social wel-

fare network in the region, diphtheria and tuberculosis, once under control, are rising and threaten to turn into epidemics. Dangerous not only for the people of the Transcaucasus - diseases spread, and Western Europe could be next.

ECHO funds organizations in all three countries to provide free care (and special foodstuffs) for pregnant women, children, and the sick. Orphanages and psychiatric clinics have also been repaired, and provided with food supplies.

Aid now - but not for ever

Finally, deprived of electricity and gas, people urgently need heating and shelter. Over the last four winters - which can be bitterly cold - ECHO has financed Oxfam's crucial distribution of kerosene in Armenia. In Azerbaijan, pre-fabricated houses have been built to accommodate refugees from conflict. And hundreds of public buildings, over-crowded by displaced people, have been repaired by ECHO's NGO partners in the field.

The European Union, through ECHO, is the biggest donor of humanitarian aid in the Transcaucasus. Sometimes there are more than 20 organizations working with ECHO funds at the same time in the region, implementing more than 50 operations simultaneously. But targeting the right people can be difficult. The most hard done-by often do not come to register - ashamed to depend on foreign aid after a life of work, efforts and worries.

ECHO correspondents do their best to assess where needs are greatest, and try to keep overhead costs as low as possible through careful monitoring. But everybody also knows that these people cannot be assisted for ever. There is a growing need to teach people how to fend for themselves, through development rather than emergency aid. That is why ECHO is reorienting its funding for the Transcaucasus in 1997, as other European Commission departments take over. Support will continue, but will instead focus on boosting incomes from agriculture and craft industries. Only in that way will the people of the Transcaucasus really begin to drag themselves out of their plight.

ECHO spent ECU 27 million on humanitarian aid in the three Republics of the Caucasus in 1996.

WAR in Afghanistan

Surviving in hell on earth

from ECHO's correspondent in Kabul

Imagine a city of about one and a half million people, fought over from house to house. Imagine Siberian winters, no food coming in over roads raped by tanks. Imagine having no husband, a home with a leaking roof, no income and five children to feed. Imagine sending your children to look for wood and water over roads littered with human waste. Imagine your son not coming home, because he stepped on a mine. Imagine living on bread and tea. Imagine losing your job because you are a woman. Imagine facing the winter, praying that you'll survive. That is Kabul for a war widow. After 20 years of war there are many widows in Afghanistan.

This is a city in which even a doctor can barely scrape together enough money to eat and heat a room. A doctor is rich in Kabul. How do people survive? Why don't they die? I wondered about that for a long time. The answer is that people help each other out. Sometimes an old man faints in the street for lack of food. The neighbourhood takes care of him. You don't see people dying, because if one dies, they all die. So what does ECHO do? What do I do? I'm an 'expert', I could talk about phases of an emergency, but you would turn the page. Afghanistan is much like a patient in casualty. You check which problems are urgent, and which can wait. I've worked in casualty. That helps me to keep a cool head here. There's much we don't do. But we supply water. A couple of French and English kids run the water supply, dig wells and carry out repairs for about 80 percent of the town. We de-mine. An Afghan doctor who decided not to leave is working on that — he has about 200 years of work ahead of him. We feed underfed children. A Canadian fed up with his previous life does a shelter programme working with a couple of hundred carpenters. We vaccinate. In winter, we give out quilts, plastic sheets and charcoal. Now let's talk about the people living in this hell on earth.

Let's talk about Youssouf. An old man with a white cap and smiling eyes. He has work now, but there is a strange sadness in those eyes. About a year ago, he was going home. But he had no food to bring home that day, as on many previous days. He could not bear the shame any more, and didn't go home, then or ever again. He guards my house at night now. Sometimes he comes in to get warm and to chat. He doesn't know where his family is now. Let's talk about Madina, a beautiful Mongolian. She is 20 and a teacher. She has no job, she has no husband. A rocket landed on her family's home one day. Her parents and brother died. Her sister-in-law had a nervous breakdown. The lovely Madina has to look after 14 children and an adult. She used to have a cleaning job. In September, the Taliban came and she lost it. I saw her just yesterday, a ghost in a pale blue chador. She couldn't come into the house. I was not allowed to talk to her, though we managed to exchange a few words through the fence.

Let's talk about Maryam, a gynaecologist with 30 years of experience, once the director of a hospital where I first met her. I was really impressed by this strong woman with her silvery grey hair in a bun. Good at her job, indestructible. She lost her job, because she is a woman. Now she sits at home and is trying to leave. She could have a good job in the West.

We could condemn flagrant abuses of human rights in Afghanistan, and leave it at that. I refuse that option. We have to help these people, help them to survive, and to make their own choices. We cannot make their choices for them.



photo LH

Men at work; women are not allowed to go out to work any more

In 1996, ECHO grants for humanitarian aid in Afghanistan totalled ECU 41.15 million.

Chechnya: end of a nightmare

The year 1996 started with a nightmare for Chechnya. The war went on, with intense fighting between Russian troops and Chechen rebels. Most major Chechen villages again came under heavy attack, and much of the Chechen capital, Grozny, was razed to the ground. For a second year running, large sectors of the civilian population – fleeing from the fighting – had to rely on the goodwill of relatives, friends and humanitarian organisations. In so doing, they also came to rely on ECHO.



Photo: P. BASHKIN / TUC

Tens of thousands of civilians were scattered throughout Chechnya and the neighbouring republics of Ingushetia and Daghestan, and are unlikely to return until their homes and basic facilities are rebuilt. Several tens of thousands more, including many ethnic Russians, sought refuge in other parts of the Russian Federation, and are unlikely ever to return to Chechnya.

Throughout 1996, ECHO's priority was to assist war victims inside Chechnya, and to reach out to vulnerable Chechen displaced people in Daghestan and Ingushetia. It aimed to preserve lives during the fighting, to help people to return home and displaced people to integrate into their societies once it was over.

Aid granted to the northern Caucasus in 1996 amounted to ECU 8.7 million, and focused on supporting the country's urgent medical needs. That included both medical supplies, and essential repairs to health services. ECHO also funded well-targeted food programmes, sanitation and water supplies, and assistance to camps housing Chechen displaced persons. That was important not only to keep people healthy, but to prevent conflict with the surrounding villages.

Six aid workers murdered

On 31 August 1996, a new peace agreement was signed, which postponed the final decision on Chechnya's constitutional status for five years. The peace deal did not reduce attacks by bandits, which remained a major operational problem. All international humanitarian organisations faced serious security problems, and access to people in need was difficult. They eventually stopped their activities and withdrew from Chechnya after a series of repeated attacks, culminating in the murder by unidentified gunmen of six Red Cross workers in December 1996.

ECHO aid granted to the northern Caucasus in 1996 amounted to ECU 8.7 million

Tajikistan

Surviving in one of the poorest countries on earth

The civil war that started in 1992 intensified over the year, bringing an already economically stricken country to its knees. In 1995, Tajikistan became one of the poorest countries on earth. A great many people are currently living on survival rations and spend all their time trying to get enough food for their families' daily needs.

Malnutrition affects the most vulnerable such as children and the elderly. The lack of fuel has forced schools and even some hospitals to close because of the cold. Medicines are either unavailable or excessively dear, except where they can be obtained from relief organizations. The population no longer has access to health care because they cannot afford it and because of the shortage of doctors. There has been a marked drop in the number of health care workers, many of whom fled the country at the start of the civil war in 1992-93. Those who have stayed do other jobs too as they cannot live on their salaries of under \$5 a month. To compound the tragedy, up to 35,000 people have been displaced as a result of the fighting and are now wholly dependent on humanitarian aid.

Priority number one: food and health care

Despite the major difficulties facing humanitarian aid organizations - political instability, the harsh climate, rugged terrain and poor communications - ECHO has been supporting a number of partners in Tajikistan. The urgency of the situation has led it to concentrate its operations on food and medical aid. Almost 600,000 of the most vulnerable people (10 per cent of the population) have received food supplements. Meals have also been distributed to school-children and hospitals. Institutions such as orphanages have likewise benefited and ECHO has been supplying medicines and medical equipment to many hospitals. It will continue these operations into 1997.

The EU is the main donor in Tajikistan. In 1996, ECHO provided ECU 14 million in addition to the ECU 4 million from the TACIS programme and ECU 16 million from DG VIII, earmarked mainly for agriculture.

Cambodia

Cambodia: the deadly silence of the minefields

photo E.KALUZINSKA



from our own correspondent in Phnom Penh

Imagine a picture-postcard Cambodian village near the ruins of an ancient pagoda — thatched houses on stilts, a fragrant early-morning breeze flicking through the coconut palms, children minding herds of pale cows with long, lyre-shaped horns, water buffalo grazing quietly. Just beyond the cashew trees at the edge of the village, there is shady woodland where the loudest sound is birdsong. It looks like a tropical paradise. Welcome to Chai Sabai. But don't walk in those woods. What you hear is the deadly silence of a minefield, shattered at the end of the working day by controlled explosions of mines or bombs buried there.

Since 1989, five people have died at Chai Sabai, and 10 have lost limbs. At least 30 farm animals have got blown up. De-miners have been working for a year to clear this land of its deadly crop. Soon, site manager Minh Sron and his men expect to move on to another field. There's no shortage of work for a trained de-miner in Cambodia — this country of some 9 million people is possibly the most densely mined in the world. About one in 300 Cambodians has a mine-related injury, usually a missing leg or two.

Handicap International runs six workshops in Cambodia, making and fitting artificial limbs

continued on p. 14

Cambodia: the deadly silence of the minefields

continued from page 13

Chai Sabai, in Kampong Thom province, is one of the places in which Handicap International is carrying out humanitarian de-mining. The action is designed to make available safe land to the hundreds of thousands of Cambodians who have yet to resettle permanently after years of conflict. Handicap is supporting the Cambodian Mines Action Centre, an organisation formed under the auspices of the government to carry out a national mine-clearance programme.

Dave McCormack, formerly an army engineer, quit the forces to become Handicap's Senior Technical Advisor on de-mining. He brought with him experience in Egypt, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kuwait and Angola, and first came to Cambodia in 1992. 'I came back because there's so much to do here,' he said. He's a quietly-spoken Canadian, fond of understatement. He works with three ex-Gurkas from Nepal on this project, training and supervising the Cambodians who do the work. 'We're not here to command them, we're here to advise them,' as ex-Gurka Kul Bahadur Gurung put it. The advisers' army training shows. There's no room for hotheads in this job. 'It takes a military mind to work out how to undo the damage,' says McCormack.



photo E.KALLONNGA

Site manager Minh Son marks out areas cleared that day at Chai Sabai minefield, Kampong Thom province

Endless patience and discipline on the job

It also takes endless patience and discipline to do one of the most tedious, potentially deadly jobs on earth. De-miners work in pairs, keeping a safe distance between them as they scour over the land inch by inch, prodding and checking results with a metal detector. No radios, no Walkmen, no smoking, no chatting on the job. Even a metal bottle-top can set off the alarm, and once that happens, there is no moving on until the offending object is found.

Safe walkways are marked with white stakes, uncleared areas are marked with red ones and warning signs. There is a scattering of yellow stakes, marking finds. One clearing has a forest of yellow markers, showing where the platoon dug out cluster bombs not much bigger than tennis balls. When they detonate, these bomblets fragment into a deadly hail of metal pieces. Made in the USA, Vietnam, China and the USSR were the source of other mines and bombs found in this particular field.

Sometimes, when they find a big bomb, the de-miners put its destructive power to constructive use, with the encouragement of the local authorities. Two men dig a deep hole, plant the bomb, and light the fuse. Come the rainy season, the crater fills up with water, creating a new fishpond.

All the men know of someone who had an accident while de-mining, but this team has a clean record so far. The team of nearly 100 men is proud of its achievements. 'You see almost instant results — sometimes, you drive by a spot you cleared on your way to the next job and you see a place to eat, or new houses where there used to be a minefield,' as one man put it. Dilkumar Limbu, ex-Gurka, intends to come back for a second year: 'In just one year, I've had more satisfaction than I got in the 26 years of my army career. Every day's real. Every time you find a mine, you save a life.'

In 1996, ECHO granted ECU 2.4 million for humanitarian aid projects in Cambodia

Every time you find a mine, you save a life



photo E.KALLONNGA

Angola: enclaves open up at last

Following the Lusaka agreement concluded in 1994 between government forces and UNITA, humanitarian organizations now have access for the first time to large swathes of territory and have been able to assess the extent of the wounds inflicted on Angola by 20 years of war. Large sections of the population have no access whatsoever to primary healthcare, drinking water, basic education or even essential products such as soap or salt.

Destruction of communications, the presence of over 10 million mines (50,000 people have had their lower limbs amputated), no public services and an explosive increase in contagious diseases have created a humanitarian situation of continuing concern. Although the humanitarian aid provided by the Commission in Angola since 1992 has saved thousands of lives and even prepared the ground for development work in certain areas such as Planalto there is still a pressing need for emergency relief in many parts of Angola.

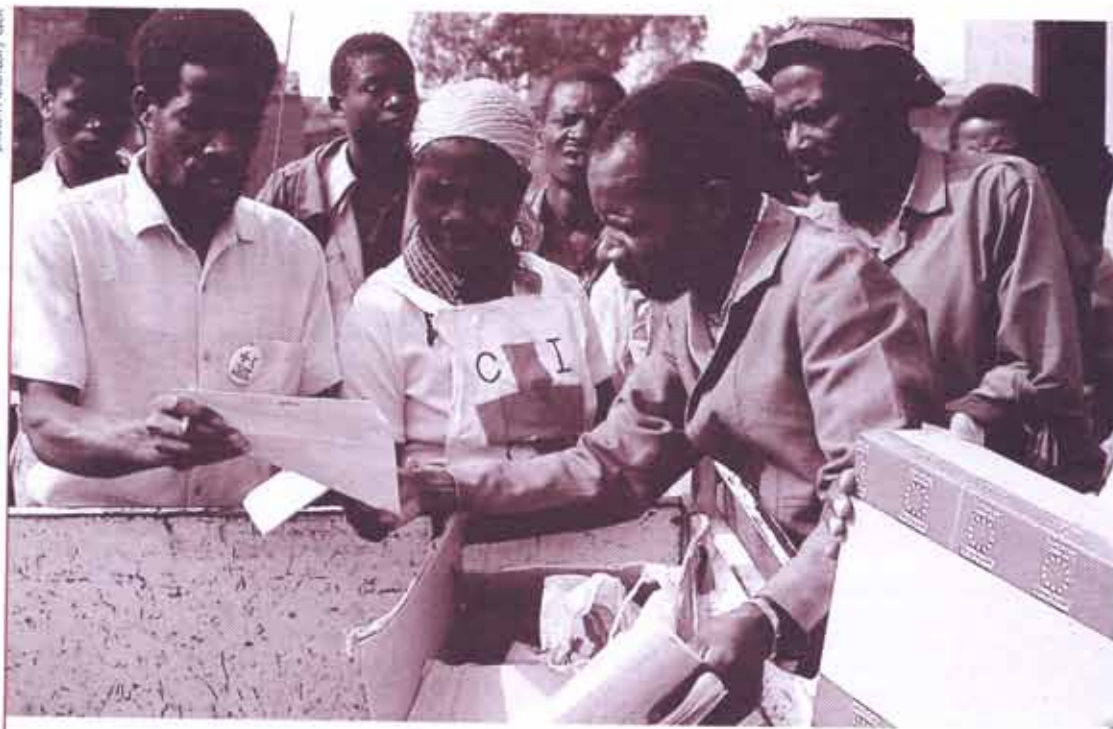
Mines and bandits

Humanitarian operations in 1996 were restricted in some regions because of the lack of security for humanitarian personnel (mines and bandits). Although the main highways are now open security is not guaranteed, as Angolans, humanitarian aid workers and United Nations forces have been killed in ambushes in various parts of the country.

From humanitarian aid to development

In the interests of efficiency and consistency ECHO and DG VIII (which deals with development) are undertaking joint planning of their operations in the health sector. ECHO has adopted an overall plan totalling ECU 14 million for the Angolan population. ECHO's priorities lie in the health sector, its objective being to reestablish rural hospitals in areas which for many years have been inaccessible to humanitarian organizations. Funds will also go to targeted mine clearing operations to facilitate access to people in areas cut off from the rest of the country. The humanitarian aid which ECHO is providing will also help open up Angola and contribute to the peace process, building confidence in Angola through the international presence it establishes and the assistance it gives to the most disadvantaged sections of the population.

photo: P. GAUTIER / CICR



Red Cross in action: humanitarian aid is still essential in many parts of the country

In 1996, ECHO contributed ECU 14 million to humanitarian aid for Angola

Liberia: aid workers face terror and looting by child soldiers

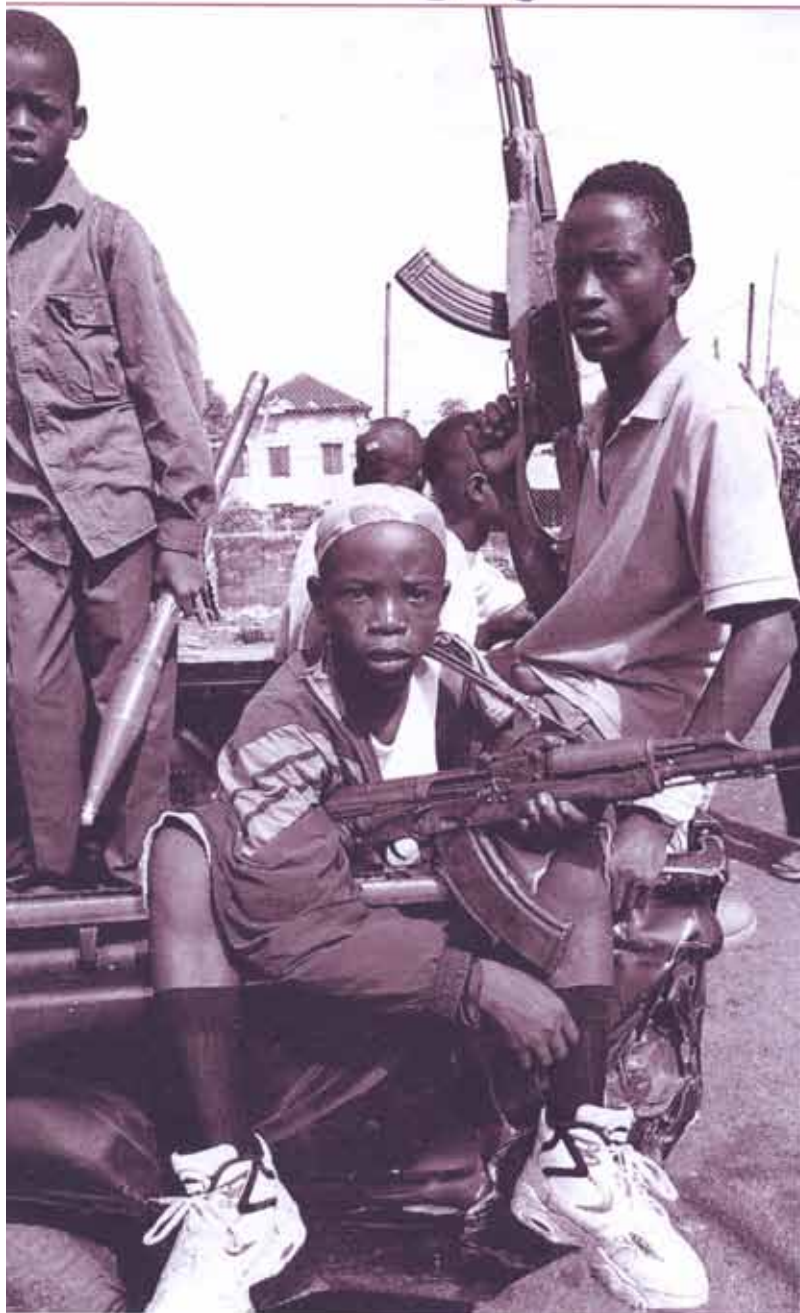


photo REUTERS, Corinne DUPON

The civil war which has been going on for six years has torn the country apart and forced a sizeable part of the population – 750,000 – to flee to neighbouring countries, with a further 800,000 others being displaced within Liberia. During April, the capital, Monrovia, was the scene of inter-factional killings.

What was left of the city's public services was looted by militia, made up in large part of child soldiers. The various armed factions have routinely taken to ransacking the regions they control, bringing ruin to the country. They loot farm produce, traffic gold and latex, terrorize local people and steal equipment from relief agencies. Over 500 vehicles belonging to humanitarian organisations went missing during clashes in Monrovia.

Severe malnutrition

The agencies supported by ECHO were forced to withdraw in view of the high risk they faced. The programmes shelved as a result – mainly covering the provision of food and health care – were able to resume after July's cease-fire.

ECHO is supporting centres for children suffering from severe malnutrition in Monrovia. In September, some regions

cut off by the fighting were opened up to relief organisations. They included the town of Tubmamburg, which had been inaccessible for seven months. When they arrived, relief workers found appalling malnutrition. Food centres were immediately set up to help the worst affected, particularly children. ECHO is working closely with DGVIII of the European Commission to provide an effective response to the enormous needs of the Liberian people.

Total ECHO aid to Liberia over the year: ECU 1.9 million

Sudan: the war goes on

As the civil war in Sudan entered its fourteenth year, prospects for peace were as remote as ever. Although the conflict is often painted as a simple north-south affair, pitting the South Sudan Liberation Army (SPLA) against the National Islamic Front (NIF) regime in the north, the situation on the ground is far more complex.

The impact of the conflict on the humanitarian situation of the civilian Sudanese population continues to be enormous. The warring parties often deliberately attack civilians in an effort to steal assets (especially cattle) and this leads to regular and distressing population displacements. More seriously, more lasting damage occurs over the long term, as non-renewable assets are gradually lost, and as traditional coping mechanisms such as trade, seasonal migration and extended family and community support networks are all gradually eroded.

Off-limits to humanitarian organisations

The sheer size of Sudan and the large area affected by the conflict makes the logistical side of humanitarian aid operations exceptionally difficult. Almost all locations are only accessible by air.

Access to populations in need is further complicated by the numerous restrictions imposed by the Government of Sudan. When the Pochalla area of south Sudan was affected by severe flooding in mid 1996 for example, the government refused for a number of weeks to allow organisations working under the UN framework of Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) to access the area. The Nuba Mountains also remain off limits to international humanitarian organisations. In this respect, the humanitarian needs that exist in many parts of Sudan are closely linked to human rights issues. Although it is the human rights record of the government which receives most public attention, it is important to remember that abuses have been and continue to be committed by all the warring parties.

During the course of 1996, ECHO allocated a total of just over ECU 17 million for humanitarian aid in Sudan, including a contribution to ECHO Flight. The majority of these funds were used for a variety of ongoing health, water and veterinary projects which seek to reinforce local capacities and traditional coping mechanisms at the same time as responding to the chronic needs that exist. Veterinary projects are a particularly effective way of trying to sustain traditional livelihoods, since cattle are intimately linked to a whole variety of social, health and economic considerations in south Sudan.

Some ECHO funds were also used to respond to the crises that arose, such as the flooding in Pochalla or outbreaks of cholera in different locations. Furthermore, ECHO continued to provide support to a number of projects in favour of the displaced populations living around Khartoum.

During the course of 1996, ECHO made available just over ECU 17 million for humanitarian aid in Sudan, including a contribution to ECHO Flight

ECHO flight Flying in relief



photo ECHO

Airlifts are vital in the vast majority of humanitarian operations. They transport humanitarian staff, goods and equipment quickly and effectively to places where men, women and children are in need. They are often the only way to get aid into parts of the world racked by ethnic tensions and civil war. Aircraft are the safest way to carry staff and avoid the routine looting and convoy blocks faced by road transport. In 1994, ECHO set up ECHO Flight, its own, exclusively humanitarian, fly-in facility. It has at its disposal a fleet of six planes based in Nairobi, Djibouti, Mendera and Lokichokio, which transport personnel and equipment to Somalia, northern Kenya and southern Sudan. Many humanitarian organizations are active in these regions and use ECHO's aircraft daily.

By the end of 1996, ECHO Flight had clocked up over 29,000 flying hours and transported 85,000 passengers and 15,000 tonnes of goods to NGOs working in the region.

Over the year, ECHO granted ECU 4.8 million to fund ECHO Flight.

Peace Smoothing the peace process

Although the guns seem to have fallen silent in Central America, ECHO now faces new challenges in the region's transition. These include demobilization, resettlement of those displaced by the fighting, support for health care structures in a bid to contain and prevent outbreaks of epidemics, relief for the victims of recurrent natural disasters, and support for those sections of society marginalized in the process of social, economic and political regeneration.



photo ECHO

Guatemala: peace brings its own pressing needs

On 29 December, the government and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG) signed a lasting peace agreement, bringing to an end 36 years of fratricidal fighting which left 100,000 dead and 30,000 missing and displaced, over a million inside and outside the country. The accord brings into force all previous partial agreements and opens the way for major structural reforms. ECHO is providing a flexible and swift response to support the first faltering steps of the peace process.

Aid for demobilized soldiers

During March and April 1997, 3,614 combatants from the URNG will be demobilized at eight camps throughout the country under the surveillance of 155 UN peacekeepers.

To help plan and support the process, a logistical back-up committee has been set up. The committee will be coordinated by the UN Mission

in Guatemala (MINUGUA) and will consist of representatives from the URNG, the government and the "group of four" (EU, UNDP, USAID and the OAS). The Committee has drawn up an aid programme for all the groups to be demobilized. ECHO will be the main donor and will take charge of medical and counselling services in all eight camps, water supply, drainage and waste disposal, food, the distribution of civilian clothing and toiletries, furniture, beds and kitchens. Already in the preparatory phase, ECHO distributed food rations to 2,200 combatants in 11 *frentes guerrilleros* awaiting demobilization throughout the country. ECHO will also appraise the socio-economic circumstances of all soldiers to help guide their resettlement in civilian life.

Resettlement of uprooted communities

Over the year, ECHO stepped up its humanitarian aid to communities uprooted by the war, supporting the first stages in resettling both returnees from Mexico and displaced people, who are either returning home or have decided to stay put.

An overall plan, put in place by various partners, has provided transport, medical and health care, medicines, extra food, logistical support (housing, tools, seeds), training and legal assistance for many repatriated and displaced communities in rural areas and disadvantaged parts of Guatemala City. Among those being helped are the Ixcán "resistance communities" who have settled for good on lands obtained along the Chixoy River. A similar solution is being negotiated for the permanent resettlement of thousands of Ixil Indians still living in the Chajul mountains of Quiché.

Nicaragua: preventing epidemics

The delicate economic situation brought on by post-war reconstruction and structural adjustment has left the neediest sections of society unprotected and exposed to newly resurgent illnesses such as cholera, malaria and dengue fever.

In the light of the highly disturbing health figures, ECHO has undertaken to support national moves to contain epidemic outbreaks and help local health services respond to and prevent disease.

Central America

Panama: humanitarian aid to Indians forced out by mining companies

In northern Panama, the livelihoods of some 120,000 Ngobe-Bugle Indians, who have been progressively edged off the fertile plain towards the mountains by the spread of industrial farming, are now seriously endangered. Over the year, new concessions enabling international companies to work mineral deposits in the Cerro Colorado, right in the middle of the Ngobe-Bugle comarca, forced more people out. Pending the outcome of the talks now finally under way between the indigenous authorities and central government, ECHO is providing the worst affected communities with assistance.

ECHO made available humanitarian aid worth ECU 6.64 million for Guatemala, Nicaragua and Panama in 1996

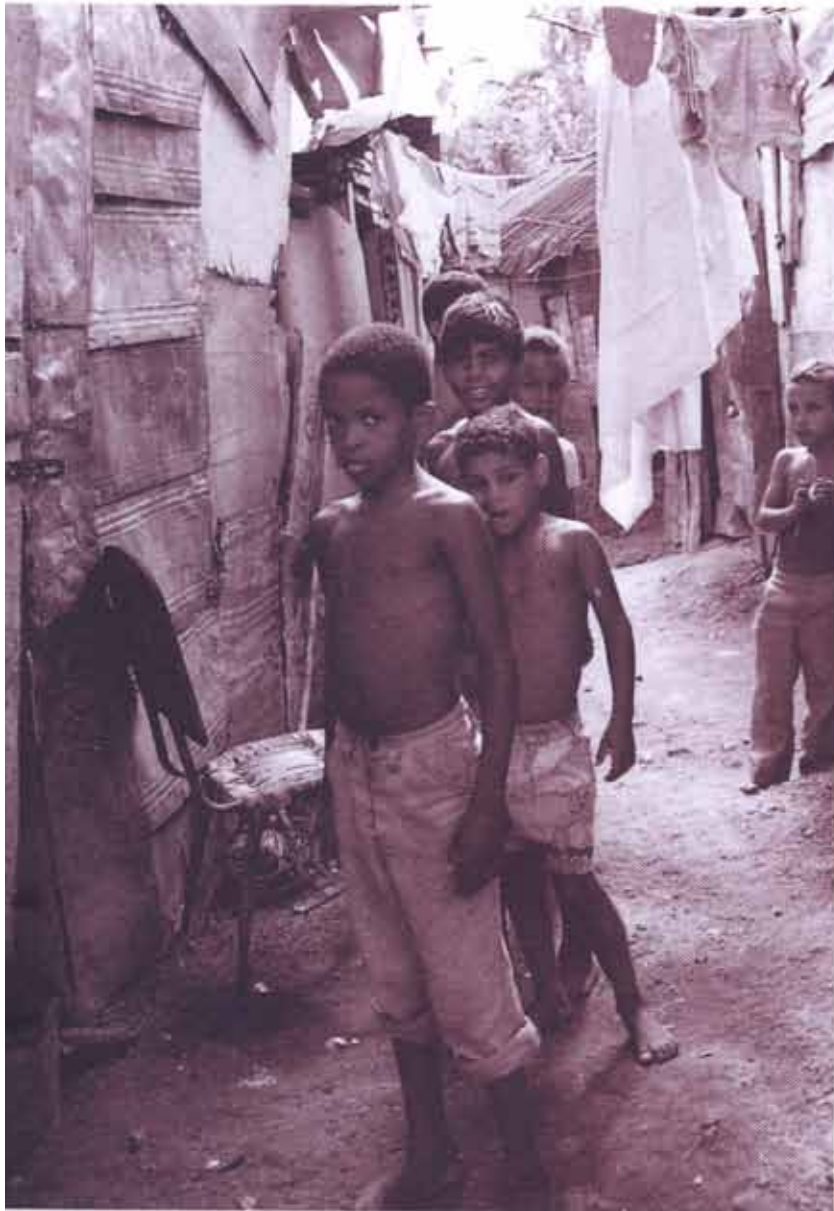


photo V. DUBLIS

Natural disasters: a permanent threat to a poor region

Central America suffers recurrent natural disasters such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tidal waves, tropical storms and flooding. The people of the region pay a high price in loss of lives and damage to property.

In July, Hurricane Cesar smashed headlong into the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua, causing serious flooding on the Pacific side of the Costa Rican cordillera. ECHO reacted immediately, repairing boreholes, providing drainage facilities and distributing medicines and food rations to 2,000 families.

In November, tropical storm Marcos brought torrential rain to northern Honduras, bursting the banks of two major rivers in the Sula Valley, the Chamalecón and the Ulúa. The floods affected more than 60,000 people and destroyed more than 7,000 hectares of crops. ECHO responded as swiftly as possible, distributing food, blankets and cooking kits to 2,000 families who had fled to the main towns. Hospitals and clinics were repaired and special assistance given to the members of independent banana cooperatives, which were practically cut off.

ECHO also supported major aid programmes for Cuba (ECU 8.6 million) and Haiti (ECU 10 million) in 1996, mainly for health care

Health care collapse

The turbulence of recent events in Israel, Palestine and Southern Lebanon has caused grave economic and social difficulties for the Palestinian communities. The rising cost of living and increasing unemployment have made the path towards peace and reconciliation in the Middle East a difficult one. Given the crucial importance of stability in the region, the Commission allocated ECU 13.4 million over 1996 in a bid to ease the daily struggle faced by many of its people.

The health sector in particular is collapsing, as living conditions deteriorate rapidly. ECHO has consequently focused the lion's share of its attention and resources to improving medical care. In Palestine, it supplied ECU 7.85 million worth of drugs and medical equipment. ECHO's previous contributions to the Bir Zeit University Centre for Environmental and Occupational Health provided the Palestinian Authority with a reliable laboratory for the analysis and control of locally – produced medication.

ECU 2.35 million was granted to private hospitals, and ECU 1.1 million to public sector hospitals in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. A further ECU 2.7 million was reserved for specialized institutions such as blood banks, rehabilitation centres, kindergartens and local NGOs. Other packages aimed at training health staff, and reorganising drugs storage and distribution systems at the Ramallah central pharmacy.

In response to the April closure of the Territories, a total of ECU 750,000 worth of emergency humanitarian aid was delivered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and WFP to vulnerable displaced people.



photosnews / TITICOM-FSP

Children living below the poverty line in Palestine

In the Lebanon, ECHO's work focused on the estimated 340,000 Palestinian refugees who live in camps around the main cities. Unlike Syria or Jordan, Lebanon has made little effort to integrate these refugees, as they are neither entitled to treatment under the national health service, nor to housing and education. The Lebanese economy has been greatly set back by the 17 year civil war which ended in 1991. As a result, about 30 percent of the population is living below the poverty line. ECHO's pledge to assist all vulnerable groups has ensured a substantial allowance for Lebanese who live in poverty (ECU 400,000). Furthermore, a fast track decision (ECU 600,000) was taken in sending emergency aid to displaced Lebanese after Israeli military operations in Southern Lebanon last April. Up to 55 percent of the population (Lebanese, Palestinian) have no access to welfare. ECHO has funded the Palestine Red Crescent Society-Lebanon through partner NGOs and UNRWA contributing to the development of numerous hospital sites, clinics and drug centres in Lebanon (ECU 3.4 million).

In conclusion, these operations formed a crucial part of the Union's approach to this particularly sensitive region. Other Commission departments work alongside ECHO to secure the long term development of Palestinians in Lebanon and the Autonomous and Occupied Territories.

In 1996, ECHO spent ECU 13.4 million in Lebanon and Palestine

Prevention Expect the unexpected

Since 1994, ECHO has spent nearly ECU 7 million on disaster preparedness – training relief staff, building weatherproof schools, setting up early warning radio systems and erecting raised anti-flood platforms. These types of operation are a direct complement to humanitarian aid, reducing deaths and material damage and thus reducing the amount of assistance needed when disasters do occur.

Four priority regions

No one can say for certain when a cyclone, volcanic eruption or earthquake will happen. But we do know which parts of the world are most at risk: the Caribbean, Central America, south east Asia and Bangladesh. ECHO has chosen to concentrate on these regions in developing its preparedness plans. So far, the projects sponsored by ECHO have been in response to specific requests from NGOs, international organizations and UN agencies. The success of these projects coupled with the continuing lack of preventive measures in development programmes has led ECHO to hone its strategy and from now on, alongside specific operations, it will support regionally-based action plans.

Visible and invisible damage

The four regions are exposed to recurrent disasters, each of which scuppers any attempt at development. The loss of human life and damage caused to housing are the most obvious scars but the whole infrastructure suffers too. Roads and bridges are cut off, utilities destroyed. If the damage to health facilities is included, it is no surprise that victims become much more vulnerable to epidemics. No degree of preparedness can prevent natural disasters but it can at least reduce the devastation they cause.

Learning the lessons

Preparedness can address certain risks which are harder to assess in the thick of a disaster itself. One striking example is that of the Aeta tribe, who lived in a remote part of the foothills around Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines. When the volcano spectacularly erupted in 1991, the whole tribe fled to the plain, where they succumbed to measles. The Aeta had never been exposed to the illness and in the months that followed, it killed more members of the tribe than the volcano itself. Similarly, in the Caribbean, the corrugated iron sheeting used for roofing can turn into a lethal weapon when ripped off by cyclones, causing death or serious injury every time. Encouraging the use of lighter materials is part of the preparedness strategy for tropical storms, which hit the region 27 times in 1995.



photo V. DUBUIS

DIPECHO

The aim of ECHO's new strategy is to make its activities more streamlined and consistent by planning them to fit in with wider development policies. For each region, a detailed and comprehensive study will be carried out to assess risks, the vulnerability of the population and the economy, and the capacity to mount a response. ECHO will then address any shortcomings identified. The main task will be to train emergency relief staff better and consolidate those organizations which can play a part in preparedness.

As part of Disaster Preparedness ECHO (DIPECHO), a network of experts will be set up. It will be made up of consultants, technical bodies and think-tanks all active in disaster preparedness generally. Practical staff training for European NGO staff will also be developed. In financing its operations, ECHO will be able to draw on more reliable European partners.

In 1996, ECHO spent ECU 5 million on disaster preparedness operations

Training humanitarian workers

Network on Humanitarian Assistance (NOHA) European Masters Programme in Humanitarian Assistance at seven European universities

Frank George and Christopher Hepp explain why they went back to school before going into the field again. Both are now working as ECHO correspondents in Kigali, Rwanda.

We are often asked why we studied humanitarian assistance and what it is all about. Friends say: "But you already have a university degree, and have worked for years in Africa. Aren't you a bit old for all that?" Their questions reflect a widespread misunderstanding of what our work is really about.

Humanitarian aid work has become a profession, marking a growing need for not only well-motivated, but also well-trained and educated staff. The environment of conflicts and disasters has changed fundamentally over recent years, requiring new skills and abilities. ECHO's decision to create the NOHA programme was a response to that need.

Frank George, economist, 34

With my one week's leave to Germany over, I am back to the reality of Rwanda. I have spent more than two of the last three years in this country, working for International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of the Red Cross on behalf of Rwandan and Burundian refugees. To be honest, three years ago I was not sufficiently prepared to play a valuable and efficient role here.

Having studied economics, with an emphasis on third world development, I started a career in the German Bank for Reconstruction and Development. But one year on, I felt a need to deal with projects in the countries themselves. After half a day in Bonn, and one day's briefing in Geneva, I found myself organizing the relief programme for 300,000 internally displaced Rwandans - comprising warehousing, transport, training of national staff and so on. I was "trained on the job", which means, to be frank, learning by making mistakes. In the ICRC structure I had a good school, but I felt a need to broaden my knowledge - above all in logistics, public health and international law.

Upon learning about the NOHA study programme (in Goma, Zaire !!!), I applied directly for a place at the University of Bochum in Germany. Out of 300 applicants, 20 were chosen and - YEAH! - I was one. The experience I have gained this year - in Brugge, Bochum, Bilbao, Brussels - will be invaluable in my new job for ECHO. I can now put all that theory into practice, and rest easy that not only am I doing my best, but that I am doing a good job!

Christopher Hepp, doctor, 35

Rwanda, Kigali: I am sitting in front of the computer creating a graphical overview of the European Commission's DGVIII and ECHO's joint project in pharmaceutical supplies to Rwanda. It is a real challenge for the European Commission to coordinate both its main development arms to assist the needs of the Rwandan population. As I design my ideas on the screen, I ask myself how it all started...

August 1994, Goma. I arrived with a totally disorganised German NGO in Goma. I had responded to an appeal on the Radio: "Cholera and Shigellosis epidemics cause thousands of deaths. Medics are needed." But I was not at all prepared for the mission - all the agencies on the spot, all the TV teams, complete chaos. After two weeks in Goma, I returned home angry and frustrated. It was impossible to help as part of this NGO. Back home I thought "this can't be!", and started my own project. I arrived two months later in Goma with clothing collected in kindergartens and schools. Alongside UNHCR Geneva, I distributed clothes for more than 5000 children to NGOs. Other one-man projects followed.

Then I started to study humanitarian assistance. Now in Kigali, working together with NGOs and UN agencies, I recognize how important it is to have this academic background. During a UNDP meeting in Kigali - as countless agency heads sit together talking about mandates, the Geneva convention, and so on - I sit there wishing they been lectured in international law or in human rights.

Similarly, at an NGO meeting in the same city, I wish that an administrator talking about medical issues had been taught Public Health. If only these people understood more about the issues they talk about. I wish they could take part in the NOHA programme on teamwork, or take its modules on joint problem-solving. For sure the NOHA program is not perfect. Its approach is academic, and there is not enough practical emphasis. But its multi-disciplinary approach has reaped rich rewards. Only now can I really start solving the problems facing the Rwandan people.

For more information on the NOHA course, please write to ECHO-NOHA, 200 rue de la Loi, 1049 Bruxelles. An information leaflet is available from ECHO INFORMATION (see address on the back cover of this report)

Evaluation: learning the lessons



photo ECHO

Do humanitarian operations match people's needs ?

Working in humanitarian aid means squaring considered thought with swift action: taking a step back to look at yourself critically and pausing for breath before setting off again. Are humanitarian operations really running smoothly on the spot? Does the aid match people's needs? Have resources been used to full effect? And what are the operation's strengths and weaknesses?

The job of evaluation is to provide the most objective possible answers to questions such as these; not only to make ourselves accountable to the institution's audit authorities and, indirectly, to the European taxpayer but also to learn lessons from each operation in a constant drive for improvement. The findings of evaluations will be taken into account in preparing operations and humanitarian aid programmes.

In order to ensure objectivity, ECHO evaluations are carried out by external and independent consultants. They generally take place as things happen during the relevant project or programme. This is because the thick of the action is the best place to gauge the effectiveness of humanitarian aid. Evaluations may be on specific operations or ECHO-sponsored programmes in a particular country or region.

Evaluation in action: Children of Chernobyl project

A marked rise in child thyroid cancer has been one of the tragic consequences of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Ukraine. As the local authorities did not have the means to provide adequate care, ECHO stepped in with a project to supply Ukraine and Belarus with the basic equipment to ascertain whether children affected had been diagnosed correctly and to give them the best possible treatment. The evaluation concluded that the equipment supplied was of excellent quality and had brought diagnosis and treatment procedures up to international scientific standards. Conversely, training of staff in the use of the equipment was found to be inadequate and so the equipment was not used to maximum effect. Future operations of this type will therefore have to focus more on training.

Evaluation

Keeping track of the money

In September 1995, ECHO introduced an audit methodology to be used at the headquarters of international organisations, non-governmental organisations and other ECHO contractors.

The methodology consists of completing five Internal Control Evaluation Questionnaires with the auditee, Compliance Testing of the controls claimed to be in existence by the auditee, and Substantive testing of transactions claimed for reimbursement under ECHO-financed contracts by the auditee.

By the end of each audit mission, ECHO has an accurate picture of the auditee's control environment and of the financial accounting systems used by them.

By the end of 1996, ECHO had carried out audits at those of its partners and contractants who received 66 percent of ECHO's total funds for the years 1995 and 1996 taken together.

The audits carried out by ECHO are not a one-sided process — they are also an effective communication medium. Organisations which wish to bring matters to the attention of ECHO find the audits useful, and ECHO's auditors are frequently able to clarify misunderstandings relating to contractual requirements and the Commission's financial regulations.

ECHO's objective is to audit by the end of 1997 those organisations that have received 80 percent of ECHO's funds for the years 1995 and 1996.

Also in 1997, ECHO will introduce a field audit methodology and start a programme of audits in the field. This methodology will focus not only on the control environment, but it will also address the issues of value for money and cost effectiveness. ECHO may undertake these missions jointly with audit teams from international organisations.

Court of Auditors

Special report on humanitarian aid

The Court has carried out an audit of a sample of humanitarian operations (134 projects accounting for ECU 468 million) undertaken between 1992 and 1995. It describes the results in a special report.

The audit covers four main aspects: transparency of the European Union's humanitarian aid policy, consistency and complementarity of aid instruments, tailoring of resources to the objectives of the aid operations and the evaluation of the impact of operations and reports.

The audit involved a review of internal procedures, checks at partners' offices, a questionnaire sent out to 38 national organisations, inspections in the field (in the former Yugoslavia and Angola) and a study of the conclusions of the Steering Committee evaluating emergency assistance to Rwanda (March 1996).

The Commission has replied to the Court's observations. Many problems have already been resolved as a result of the adoption of Council Regulation No 1257/96 of 20 June 1996 concerning humanitarian aid, the establishment of an interservice group (PISG) to ensure greater consistency in the use of aid instruments, the Commission communication of 30 April 1996 on linking relief, rehabilitation and development and the introduction of a manual to improve evaluation methodology. The Commission considers the Court's comments both pertinent and a valuable contribution to the discussions on the future of ECHO and humanitarian aid.

Humanitarian aid under the Phare programme

Bulgaria: support for poor families, orphans, the handicapped and the elderly

Many Bulgarian families are finding it hard to meet their basic needs because of the country's grave economic crisis. As the welfare system cannot provide adequate coverage, the Commission decided to offer direct financial support to families suffering hardship and to those institutions which look after needy groups such as orphans, the handicapped and the elderly.



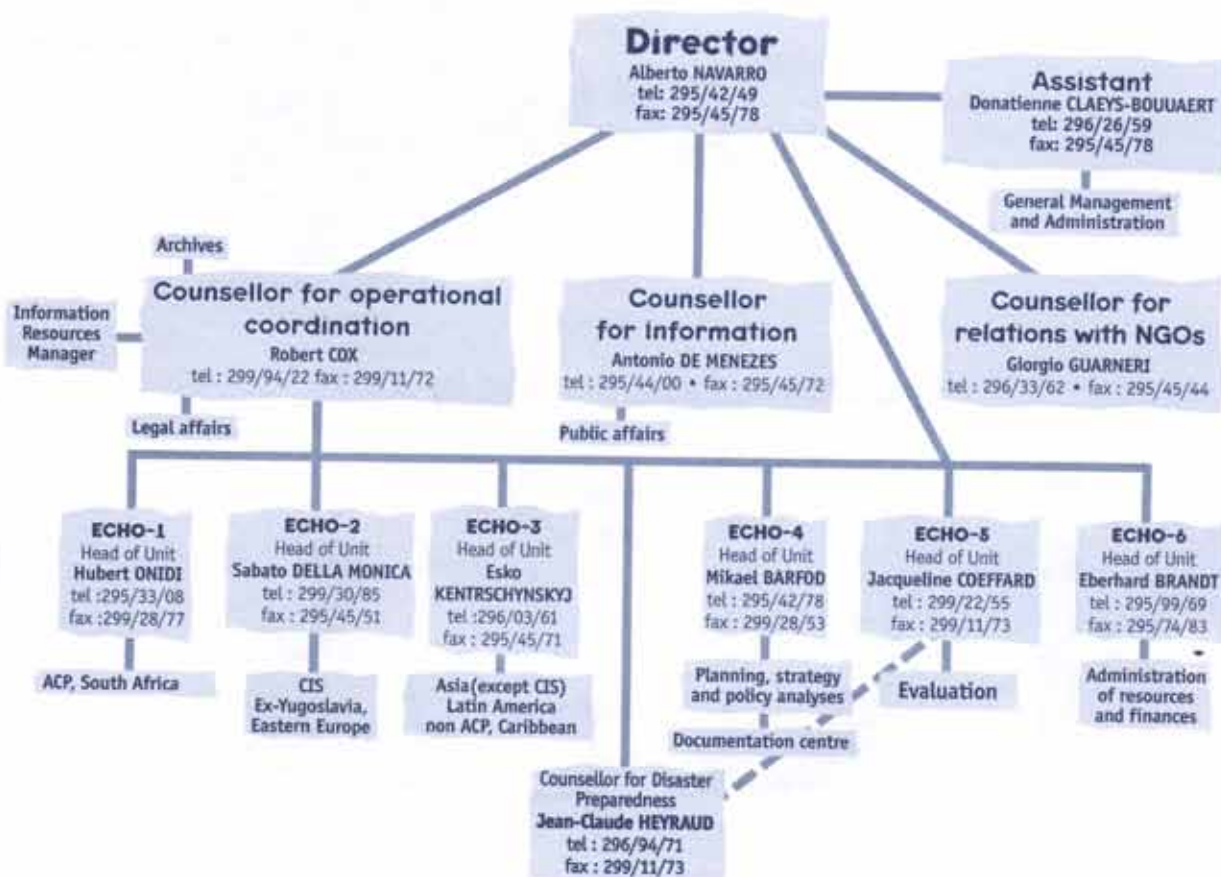
photo ECHO

The Phare programme, which supports the process of economic restructuring in Central and East Europe, also provides humanitarian aid if necessary. A programme for Bulgaria became essential last December. The programme was developed together with the Bulgarian ministry for labour and social security. It will increase the spending power of half a million families and 550 organizations over the winter months. The Phare contribution will enable each family to buy a kilo of bread and a litre of milk a day for four months. ECU 20 million has been provided for the operation.

Phare is providing direct financial aid for institutions such as orphanages

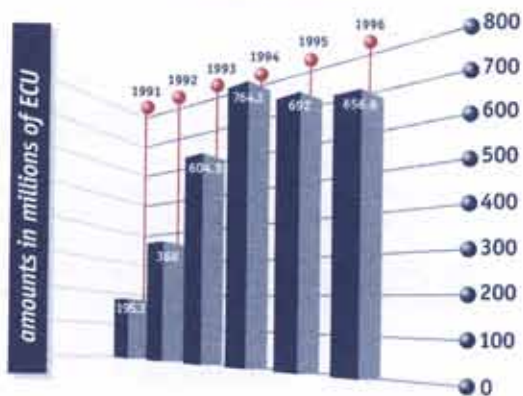
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ECHO's who

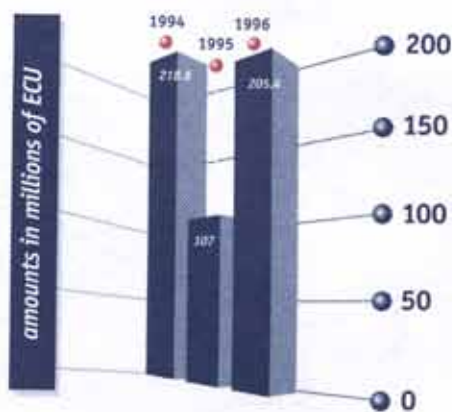


Facts and figures

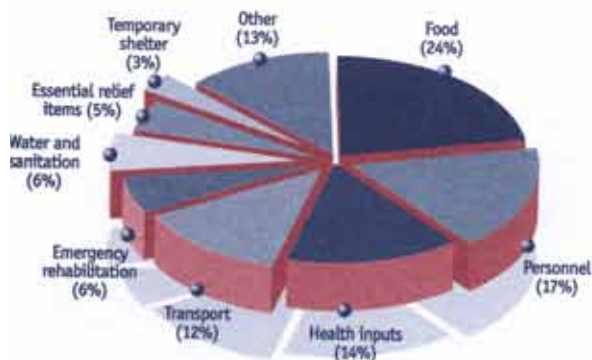
Financial decisions 1991-1996



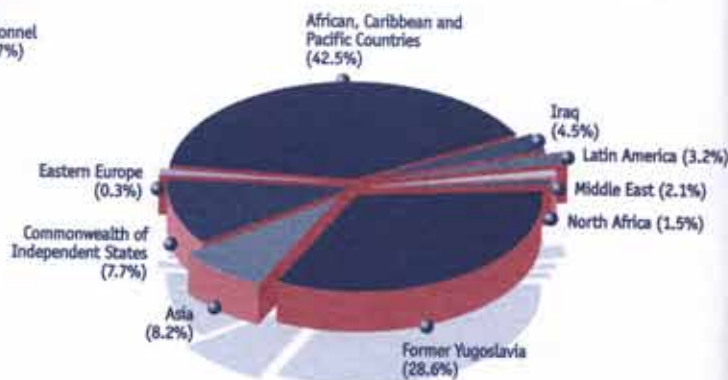
ECHO funding for Great Lakes crisis 1994-1996



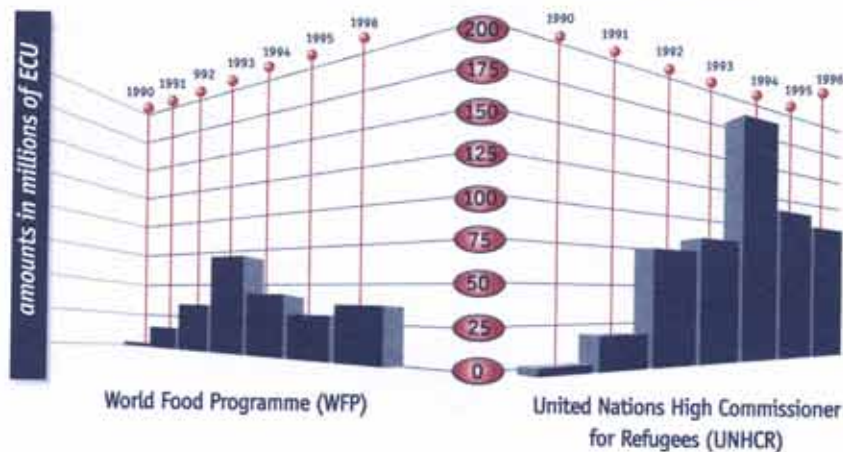
Breakdown by sector, 1996



Breakdown by region, 1996



Main UN agencies financed by ECHO



Humanitarian aid: 1996 decisions country by country

COUNTRY/REGION	DECISION IN ECU	COUNTRY/REGION	DECISION IN ECU
EX-YUGOSLAVIA	187,000,000	LAOS	500,000
ACP TOTAL	278,040,000	MYANMAR (BURMA)	300,000
ANGOLA	14,000,000	NORTH KOREA	500,000
BURKINA FASO	300,000	SRI LANKA	1,175,000
CHAD	850,000	THAILAND	3,420,000
EASTERN & CENTRAL AFRICA	27,075,000	VIETNAM	200,000
ETHIOPIA	646,000	YEMEN	150,000
GHANA	140,000	NORTH AFRICA/MIDDLE EAST	20,900,000
GUINEA	160,000	ALGERIA	7,000,000
GREAT LAKES REGION	205,430,000	LEBANON	1,400,000
HAITI	10,000,000	MOROCCO	500,000
IVORY COST	340,000	PALESTINE/ISRAEL	12,000,000
KENYA	342,000	LATIN AMERICA	19,090,000
LIBERIA	1,900,000	COLOMBIA	1,060,000
MADAGASCAR	315,000	COSTA RICA	400,000
MALI	2,100,000	CUBA	8,600,000
MOZAMBIQUE	317,000	ECUADOR	300,000
MAURITANIA	80,000	GUATEMALA	4,690,000
NIGERIA	1,050,000	HONDURAS	450,000
SENEGAL	550,000	MONTserrat	380,000
SIERRA LEONE	7,000,000	NICARAGUA	1,750,000
SOMALIA	5,000,000	PANAMA	200,000
SUDAN	300,000	PERU	1,260,000
ZAIRE	145,000	<i>GENERAL STUDIES</i>	<i>1,940,000</i>
C.I.S (1)	53,450,000	<i>FOOD AID (several countries)</i>	<i>2,000,000</i>
ARMENIA	5,070,000	<i>COORDINATION & MONITORING</i>	<i>4,500,000</i>
AZERBAIJAN	9,450,000	<i>DISASTER PREPAREDNESS</i>	<i>5,012,500</i>
GEORGIA	12,630,000	<i>MISCELLANEOUS</i>	<i>278,000</i>
BELRUS	500,000	GRAND TOTAL	656,655,500
KIRGYZSTAN	3,600,000		
RUSSIAN FEDERATION	8,120,000		
TAJIKISTAN	12,780,000		
CHERNOBYL Disaster	1,300,000		
EASTERN EUROPE	1,650,000		
ALBANIA	1,650,000		
IRAQ	29,520,000		
ASIA	53,275,000		
AFGHANISTAN	41,100,000		
BANGLADESH	300,000		
CAMBODIA	2,490,000		
CHINA	2,450,000		
INDONESIA	120,000		
INDIA	570,000		

(1) Commonwealth of Independent States

ECHO's main partners

Name	Country
ACTION CONTRA EL HAMBRE (E)	SPAIN
ACTION CONTRE LA FAIM (F)	FRANCE
ACTION NORD-SUD FRANCE	FRANCE
AIDE MEDICALE INTERNATIONALE FRANCE	FRANCE
ARBEITER-SAMARITER-BUND DEUTSCHLAND e.V.	GERMANY
BRITISH RED CROSS	UNITED KINGDOM
CARE INTERNATIONAL (UK)	UNITED KINGDOM
CARITAS DENMARK	DENMARK
CENTRO REGIONALE D'INTERVENTO PER LA COOPERAZIONE	ITALY
CESVI COOPERAZIONE E SVILUPPO	ITALY
CHILDREN'S AID DIRECT (UK)	UNITED KINGDOM
CHRISTIAN AID	UNITED KINGDOM
COMITATO INTERNAZIONALE PER LO SVILUPPO DEI POPOLI	ITALY
INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE OF THE RED CROSS	SWITZERLAND
CONCERN UNIVERSAL	UNITED KINGDOM
CONCERN WORLDWIDE	IRELAND
CROIX ROUGE BELGE	BELGIUM
CROIX ROUGE FRANCAISE	FRANCE
CRUZ ROJA ESPAÑOLA	SPAIN
DANISH REFUGEE COUNCIL - DANSK FLYGTNINGEHAELP	DENMARK
DEUTSCHE WELTHUNGERHILFE / GERMAN AGRO ACTION	GERMANY
DEUTSCHES ROTES KREUZ	GERMANY
EQUILIBRE FRANCE	FRANCE
INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF RED CROSS AND CRESCENT SOCIETIES	SWITZERLAND
FRANCE LIBERTES (FONDATION DANIELLE MITTERRAND)	FRANCE
GOAL	IRELAND
GRUPPO VOLONTARIATO CIVILE	ITALY
HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL (B)	BELGIUM
HANDICAP INTERNATIONAL (F)	FRANCE
HELP AGE INTERNATIONAL	UNITED KINGDOM
HET NEDERLANDSE RODE KRUIS	NETHERLANDS
HILFE FÜR KINDER IN NOT E.V. (CHILDREN'S RELIEF)	GERMANY
INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
INTERSOS (ASSOCIAZIONE UMANITARIA PER L'EMERGENZA)	ITALY
MEDECINS DU MONDE (F)	FRANCE
MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES (F)	FRANCE
MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES/ARTSEN ZONDER GRENZEN (B)	BELGIUM
MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES/ARTSEN ZONDER GRENZEN (NL)	NETHERLANDS
MEDICAL EMERGENCY RELIEF INTERNATIONAL	UNITED KINGDOM
MEDICOS DEL MUNDO (E)	SPAIN
MEDICOS SIN FRONTERAS (E)	SPAIN
MOVIMIENTO POR LA PAZ, EL DESARME Y LA LIBERTAD	SPAIN
MOVIMONDO MOLISV	ITALY
OXFAM (UK)	UNITED KINGDOM
PAZ Y TERCER MUNDO	SPAIN
PHARMACIENS SANS FRONTIERES (F)	FRANCE
PREMIERE URGENCE	FRANCE
RED BARNET	DENMARK
SAVE THE CHILDREN FUND (UK)	UNITED KINGDOM
SECOURS POPULAIRE FRANCAIS	FRANCE
SOLIDARITES	FRANCE
SVENSKA RODA KORSET (SWEDISH RED CROSS)	SWEDEN
TERRE DES HOMMES (CH)	SWITZERLAND
UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND (UNICEF)	SWITZERLAND
UNITED NATIONS - HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES	SWITZERLAND
UNITED NATIONS - WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME	ITALY

Raising awareness of humanitarian action today

AWARDS

ECHO TV and radio awards



What is the best way of informing the public about humanitarian actions today? Bombarding people with statistics about deaths or atrocities turns them off. Such abstractions do not communicate realities and may distance readers, listeners or viewers from trying to understand what is going on. TV images of human misery or barbarity in disaster zones or theatres of war have the power to shock, but all too often, they seldom explain the context well enough to make more than a fleeting impression.

ECHO recognises the potential role of the media in conveying the realities of humanitarian actions via responsible reporting. This year, it launched the ECHO TV and Radio awards scheme, an annual event to encourage productions that raise awareness about crises in all their complexity.

The awards are intended to highlight the role and the responsibilities of the media, and to encourage television and radio stations to give higher priority to in-depth documentaries and features on humanitarian affairs. The main categories reflect the many aspects of ECHO's actions today.

The response was very encouraging: there were over 220 entries, with productions from all Member States of the European Union, from both national TV stations and independent producers. The international team of judges included Princess Christina, President of the Swedish Red Cross; Jung Chang, Chinese author; Martin Bell, BBC foreign correspondent and Jean Rouch, French film-maker.

The award ceremony was held during the Irish Presidency of the EU at the Royal Hospital Kilmainham in the presence of President Mary Robinson. It was televised live by RTE, the Irish national television station.

Categories and winners:

- **People on the move:** highlighting the humanitarian consequences of sudden or forced population movements.
L'Aube-Dawn, Causes Communes, Belgium;
- **In the minds of people:** causes and consequences of psychological trauma suffered by individuals and groups as a result of crises
Enemy, my friend? Eyedeas, UK.
- **Forgotten conflicts:** protracted conflict situations which are otherwise largely ignored in the news and mainstream media.
Liberia: The murder of a country, Sveriges Television, Sweden.
- **Vulnerable groups:** the plight of the most vulnerable – women, children and the elderly.
The dead are alive: Rwanda, an eyewitness, Wild Heart Productions, Belgium.
- **Radio award:** the most incisive and analytical coverage of an emergency or humanitarian crisis.
The plight of Turkish writers, Eurofile, BBC Radio 4, UK.
- **Broadcast Commitment:** commitment of a TV or radio station to a particular campaign.
The Hague Diaries, Internews, France and USA.

Write to ECHO Information for details of 1997 awards



photos: ECHO