

ECHO Annual Partners Conference

Forum 1: Title *Working side by side or blurring the lines? The challenging interaction between humanitarian action and stabilisation strategies*

Date: 19.10.2011

Time: 09:00-10:00 hrs

Introductory speech by: Harald Happel, Caritas Europa

Ladies and gentlemen,

1. There is no doubt that those providing humanitarian assistance today do so in a highly complex environment. Increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters has seen unprecedented numbers of people in need of humanitarian assistance, and in conflicts, abuse of rights and the failure of states and non-state armed actors to observe the rules of war have confounded efforts to provide assistance to those who require it. In recent years the move towards more clearly articulating the linkages between aid, security and foreign policy has become pervasive. This shift in focus from needs-based to securitisation priorities is reflected in the emergence and growing pre-eminence of an international 'stabilisation' agenda which includes 'a combination of military, humanitarian, political and economic activities to control, contain and manage areas affected by armed conflict and complex emergencies.'¹
2. One consequence of the aid coherence agenda has been a growth in donor efforts to focus their resources on 'fragile states'.² While this is laudable as many fragile states have significant humanitarian need, the disproportionate value of humanitarian aid to places where donors are also combatants is particularly striking. There are serious estimations stating that despite having comparable levels of need, since 2001, the Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) population has received at best \$10 per head per year in international assistance while people in Iraq, a far wealthier country, have in some years received over twelve times that amount.³
3. The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid provides a strong policy framework, which also addresses the challenges around coherence, complementarity, and the coordination of the different actors. In doing so,

¹ Collinson, S., Elhawary, S. & Muggah, R. (2010), *States of Fragility: Stabilisation and its Implications for humanitarian action*; HPG Working Paper, May, p.3 [Online]. Available:

<http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/4881.pdf>, (Accessed 18 August 2011)

² The OECD defines fragile states as 'those failing to provide basic services to poor people because they are unwilling or unable to do so.' OECD (2007), *Glossary of Statistical Terms* [Online]. Available:

<http://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=7235>, (Accessed 19 August 2011)

³ Oxfam International 2011, *Whose Aid is it Anyway? Politicizing aid in conflicts and crises*, 145 Oxfam Briefing paper, p.10 [Online]. Available: http://www.oxfam.org.uk/resources/policy/debt_aid/downloads/bp145-whose-aid-anyway-100211-en.pdf, (Accessed 12 May 2011)

the Consensus reaffirms the operational importance of humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence and strongly states that humanitarian aid is not a crisis management tool. Despite the European Consensus making these important statements, there are prominent examples among key European stakeholders that the focus has shifted, thus indicating a gap between policy and practice:

- a. In its 2009 aid allocation policy, France prescribed that its criteria for selecting aid recipients would include their importance to French national defence and counter-terrorism strategies in addition to five needs-based criteria.⁴
 - b. Similarly, the UK's 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review commits to tackling the root causes of instability through "an effective international development programme making the optimal contribution to national security within its overall objective of poverty reduction, with the Department for International Development focussing significantly more effort on priority national security and fragile states."⁵
 - c. Looking at the fast changing EU institutional environment we witness a balancing act of promoting principled humanitarian action alongside strengthening collaboration across EU institutions. While ECHO remains outside the remit of the EEAS, the terms of the Lisbon Treaty require that humanitarian aid policy is conducted within the framework of the principles and objectives of the EU external action, the implication of which is that there is now a far greater potential for politicisation, particularly in situations of violent conflict.
4. While the argument for an inclusive approach to aid that recognises peoples' right to security and access to justice in addition to their basic needs is valid, it is critical that efforts to provide these are based on the needs of affected people and states rather than on donor priorities. In complex political crises such as Afghanistan and Somalia, it is important to recognise the need for a political process which may require integrated approaches across a range of policy areas from an array of actors. However, this should not mean subsuming humanitarian assistance into defence or foreign policy.⁶ In Article 22, the Humanitarian Consensus explicitly outlines the relationship of humanitarian aid to other policies, including development cooperation, crisis management and civil protection. While it recognises the importance of

⁴ République Française (2010), *Document de Politique Transversale: Politique Française en faveur du Développement* [Online]. Available: <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/IMG/pdf/DPTapd.pdf>, (Accessed 18 August 2011).

⁵ HM Government (2010), *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, p.11 [Online]. Available: http://www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/documents/digitalasset/dg_191634.pdf?CID=PDF&PLA=furl&CRE=sdsr, (Accessed 13 May 2011)

⁶ Saferworld (2011), *The securitisation of aid? Reclaiming security to meet poor people's needs* [Online]. Available: <http://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/view-resource/505>, (Accessed 11 May 2011)

coherence and complementarity, it makes the important assertion that the principles that apply to humanitarian aid are distinct from these other forms of assistance.

5. Humanitarian principles provide the foundation for humanitarian action. Based on international humanitarian law (IHL), they are considered essential for establishing and maintaining access to affected populations based on trust and acceptance of assistance, whether in the context of a natural disaster, an armed conflict or in complex emergency situations. In politicised and insecure environments it is this trust that allows NGOs, the Red Cross/Red Crescent societies and UN agencies to provide life-saving assistance. When governments, militaries or donors seek to co-opt or undermine these principles, this trust can be damaged or destroyed and it can become too dangerous to assist those who most require it.

Among many examples, which underpin that the principled approach to humanitarian aid is undermined, I want to highlight the following:

- Political motivated funding for Afghanistan: Rather than providing needs-based funding, political and military conditions have been placed on the use of funds to direct aid towards specific areas linked to military presence. For example, the German Ministry for Economic and Development Cooperation established a new funding line of €10 million which was open only to those NGOs willing to implement projects in Northern Afghanistan where the German army is based. The funding offer was further linked to an agreement to exchange information with the army. This not only undermines the principle of impartiality and neutrality but also that of independence, creating significant security risks for NGOs that are perceived as cooperating with the German military.
- Anti-Terrorism Laws and their impact on Somalia
The strong anti-terrorist stance taken by donors, which has had the effect to date of restricting assistance to some of the most crisis-affected areas, has arguably reinforced perceptions of the partiality of aid in Somalia. With aid seen as a non-neutral political tool, al-Shabaab is wary of attempts by the international community to respond in Somalia. The recent declaration of famine by the UN in certain areas, for example, was dismissed by al-Shabaab as political propaganda.⁷ Ultimately, this politicisation of the humanitarian crisis by all actors has serious consequences for people and communities in extreme need, as access to them is so restricted.

⁷ U.S. Department of State (2011), *Background Briefing on Somalia and Delivery of Humanitarian Assistance* [Online]. Available: <http://www.state.gov/p/af/rls/spbr/2011/169479.htm>, [Accessed 16 August 2011]

6. While there are no easy solutions for better targeting people in complex emergency settings there are better ways than through comprehensive agendas or integrated missions. Evidence suggests that those agencies who have worked with all parties to the conflict for an increased understanding and application of the humanitarian principles have managed - in many cases - to secure their presence and continued to bring assistance to affected populations. Although these practical elements can be explored further in the course of this forum, we shall remember that it is in the capital cities of the North where policies are decided. These lay the institutional framework for how people in need can be supported and life saving assistance be delivered.
7. A recent Caritas Europa report, entitled “Bridging the gap between Policy and Practice” highlights trends and practices in the implementation of the Consensus by the EU and the Member States. The Member Organisations of Caritas Europa consider that there is a vital need to continue to raise awareness throughout various ministries of Member States involved in humanitarian aid and disaster response. The challenge in particular is to ensure that policies and practices across all relevant ministries are coherent with the Consensus. Equally, this is of outmost importance at an EU institutional level, not just by the Commission through DG ECHO but throughout the institutions and the process of strengthening the EU’s disaster response capacity. A key recommendation therefore is to maintain the specific mandate of ECHO and to ensure a clear division of labour between the First Vice President of the Commission and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response.
8. To conclude: Humanitarian needs are on the rise and the EU is one of the main humanitarian donors at global level. The European Consensus for Humanitarian Aid is a solid policy framework EU Member States and its institutions can be proud of. However, its concepts and principles have to be applied and put into practice. A commitment across all EU institutions to principled humanitarian engagement and a shared undertaking not to use humanitarian aid as a crisis management tool will provide the strongest foundation for the provision of effective assistance to those affected by disaster and maintain the image of the EU as a quality humanitarian donor at global level. It is urgent to bridge this gap between policy and practice.

Thank you very much for your attention.