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F E A T U R E S

humanitarian aid



Annual
Review
2008



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RECORD LEVEL OF COMMISSION ASSISTANCE REFLECTS GROWING HUMANITARIAN NEEDS

Thousands of lives lost, hundreds of thousands of people uprooted and displaced with no access to food, water or any other means of subsistence. Disasters, whether man-made or natural, cause untold devastation and suffering. When they happen, it is our human duty to stand by those in need. We must also do everything possible to prevent the foreseeable consequences of disasters. This is the concrete expression of European solidarity, a genuine cornerstone of our founding values.

In 2008, the European Union brought relief to 120 million people in more than 60 countries with humanitarian funding totalling €937 million. This record amount reflects humanitarian needs that, unfortunately, are ever-increasing. Our aid is deployed in line with humanitarian principles: in other words in a neutral, impartial and independent way. It is allocated solely on the basis of the needs of the people concerned, not as a result of political considerations.

During the first half of 2008, the price of food and raw materials shot up, plunging 75 million more people into the vicious cycle of food insecurity. Around 973 million people now suffer from hunger worldwide. This is a dramatic and deeply shocking figure, which is why we almost doubled our emergency food aid budget.

There was an increase in the number of natural disasters in 2008, and they were more intense than in the past. This is due, at least in part, to global warming. From Asia to Central America and Africa, millions of people were again able to deal with the devastating consequences of cyclones, floods and droughts thanks to European humanitarian aid.

In addition to natural disasters, civilians continued to pay a heavy price in crises brought about solely by the actions of human beings. While some conflicts, like those in Georgia or Sudan/Darfur, make the headlines, others no less dramatic unfold far from the eyes and conscience of the world, with a secrecy that sometimes borders on oblivion. The role of the European Commission is precisely to deliver humanitarian aid wherever people are suffering, whether it is in Somalia, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo or Zimbabwe.

Unfortunately, 2008 also ended on a particularly sombre note with the conflict in the Palestinian territory of the Gaza Strip. Here, as in other conflicts, international humanitarian law was flouted by the warring factions. It is unacceptable for civilians, and for the humanitarian workers who come to their aid, to be put in harm's way or indeed to be directly targeted. Representing the European Commission, I have consistently denounced such violations of international humanitarian law. The rules were designed precisely for war situations - to protect civilians and ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid.

The European commitment to international law and humanitarian principles is one of the pillars of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid adopted by all 27 EU Member States at the end of 2007. To work tirelessly and relentlessly to ensure that the 'humanitarian space' is better respected worldwide is not simply a question of compliance with international law. It is a universal duty of humanity.

Louis Michel
*European Commissioner for Development
and Humanitarian Aid*

KEY EVENTS 2008

January

Hundreds die in tribal violence in **Kenya** after incumbent Mwai Kibaki is declared the winner in the presidential election by a very small margin over opposition leader Raila Odinga. Around 1,000 people die in the violence and an estimated 300,000 are displaced from their homes.

The **Sri Lankan** government abrogates the 2002 ceasefire agreement with the LTTE (Tamil Tigers) and announces its intention to pursue a military solution to the conflict in the north of the island.

UNAMID, the African Union-United Nations operation in **Darfur** begins deployment in the conflict-hit region. It replaces AMIS, the African Union Mission in Sudan.

February

In **Sudan**, 58,000 people are forced to flee their homes as fierce fighting breaks out between government troops/Janjaweed militia and rebels forces.

Almost 13,000 people are displaced in southern **Kazakhstan** due to floods provoked by heavy rains and melting snow.

The "La Niña" phenomenon causes heavy floods in **Bolivia** and **Ecuador**, affecting more than 700,000 people.

April

Poor harvests and big energy price rises lead to dramatic increases in global food prices. Poor importing countries are badly affected. In **Haiti**, dozens are killed and injured when demonstrations against rising food prices turn into riots.

Nepal holds an historic election as voters choose a Constituent Assembly charged with drawing up a new constitution. Maoist rebels, who signed a peace agreement with the government, win 120 of the 240 directly elected seats.

South-eastern pastoral areas of **Ethiopia** again suffer the consequences of poor rainfall. An estimated 950,000 people require urgent humanitarian assistance.

May

In **Myanmar**, Cyclone Nargis ravages the Irrawaddy Delta and Yangon, killing more

than 140,000 people and leaving almost a million homeless.

At least 70,000 people are killed and thousands injured when a 7.9 magnitude earthquake strikes western **China**. It is the country's worst natural disaster in three decades.

Louis Michel, European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, undertakes the first high-level international mission to **Myanmar** following Cyclone Nargis. He calls for rapid and adequate access for humanitarian aid to the stricken communities in the Irrawaddy Delta.

As a follow-up to the Humanitarian Aid Consensus Action Plan, the Council decides to transform the Food Aid Working Party into a Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (**COHAF**) as of January 2009. This group will provide representatives from Member States' governments and the Commission with a specific forum for discussion on humanitarian and food aid policy issues.

The Commission adopts a Communication setting out policy options to mitigate the effects of rising global **food prices** on poor populations.

Fighting between **Sudanese** government forces and the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) in the town of Abyei forces 50,000 people to flee.

June

Zimbabwe's election campaign is characterised by widespread violence and intimidation, against a backdrop of rapidly increasing humanitarian needs.

Flash foods and mudslides unleashed by heavy monsoon rains claim hundreds of lives and displace hundreds of thousands of people in north-eastern **India**.

July

Sudanese President Omar al Bashir is accused of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Seven UN peacekeepers die and 22 are wounded in **Darfur** when their convoy is ambushed by men in trucks and on horseback.

The EC Council, representing the Member States of the European Union, endorses the five-



year Action Plan drawn up by the Commission for implementing the European **Consensus** on Humanitarian Aid (see http://ec.europa.eu/echo/policies/consensus_en.htm).

August

Fighting between **Russia** and **Georgia** in the breakaway region of South Ossetia develops into a major crisis. UNHCR estimates that 158,000 people are forced from their homes.

Armed conflict in **Mindanao**, Philippines flares up again between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the government, resulting in the displacement of some 400,000 people.

Tropical Storm Fay hits the Caribbean leaving devastation in its wake. Within a few weeks, the region is hammered by three more named storms (Gustav, Hannah and Ike). **Haiti** suffers the worst effects with more than 500 killed in the northern city of Gonaïves in October (Hannah). **Cuba**, the **Dominican Republic**, the **Turks and Caicos** islands and **Jamaica** are also badly hit.

Four aid staff working for the International Rescue Committee are killed in **Afghanistan**. The EU reiterates its call for the respect of international humanitarian law (IHL).

Heavy rains cause floods defences on the Kosi River to crumble and large areas in both **Nepal** and the Indian state of **Bihar** are flooded. Millions of people are affected and 200,000 hectares of crops destroyed.

September

The European Commission and European Parliament stage a conference on "Promoting Compliance with **International Humanitarian Law**: A Major Challenge, A Global Responsibility". High-level participants discuss concrete steps to improve and promote IHL and protect the humanitarian space.

Aid agencies report that almost 180,000 people have been displaced by heavy monsoon flooding in western **Nepal**.

As the conflict escalates in northern **Sri Lanka** and the number of people displaced rises to 300,000, the government orders international NGOs and UN agencies working in the Vanni to relocate their operations outside the conflict area. Only ICRC is allowed to remain.

Figures for newly displaced people in **Colombia** are published by a local NGO. A record 270,000 new IDPs are reported, a 41% increase on the equivalent period in 2007.

October

Zimbabwe's annual inflation hits a record 231 million percent. Many people in rural communities are also affected by the bad harvest, and the WFP launches a new feeding programme targeting the most vulnerable.

Ethiopia announces that 6.4 million of its people need emergency food aid due to drought. The food crisis has steadily worsened since April when the government estimated that some 2.2 million people needed emergency help.

In **DR Congo's** North Kivu province, clashes between the army and forces loyal to renegade General Laurent Nkunda force around 250,000 civilians from their homes.

In Sudan's **Darfur** region, another spike in violence brings the total number forced to leave their homes this year to 250,000. International peacekeepers and aid workers increasingly come under attack. The number of internally displaced people, after four years of conflict, reaches 2.5 million.

A tropical depression affects Central America causing heavy rainfall, floods and landslides, especially in **Honduras and Guatemala**. More than 250,000 people are affected.

November

The third hurricane in less than three months, Paloma, makes landfall in **Cuba**.

50,000 **Congolese** villagers flee raids by Uganda's rebel Lord's Resistance Army.

December

The WHO warns that up to 60,000 people in **Zimbabwe** could become infected with cholera if the outbreak that began in August spirals out of control. 33,000 cases have already been reported by the end of the year including more than 1,600 fatalities.

An estimated 80,000 people along the northern coast of **Papua New Guinea** are displaced by floods after abnormally high tides.

On 27 December, Israel launches a military offensive on **Gaza** following repeated Hamas rocket attacks on its territory. The already precarious humanitarian situation in Gaza deteriorates sharply.

Sri Lankan forces make significant strategic gains in territory controlled by the Tamil Tigers. 300,000 displaced people are caught up in the conflict zone, unable to move to safe areas.





THE HUMANITARIAN SPACE UNDER PRESSURE: DON'T SHOOT AT THE AMBULANCE!

.. or at civilians

For the past few years, civilians have increasingly become victims of conflicts. This not a question of bad luck; of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. It is because they are now deliberately being targeted.

There are few conflicts today where civilians are not effectively being held hostage by the warring parties. International humanitarian law is less and less respected, there are fewer defenders of the law, and indiscriminate attacks are commonplace.

There also seems to be a growing tendency to close the door to humanitarians, preventing them from helping the victims.

... or at humanitarian workers

In Somalia, 37 humanitarian workers were killed in 2008. In Sudan, buildings belonging to relief organisations were attacked, vehicles and convoys hijacked, and personnel murdered or kidnapped. In Afghanistan, 38 relief workers were killed, twice the number recorded in 2007; 140 others were kidnapped.

The shocking reality is that the principles and values on which humanitarian aid are founded are not acknowledged or are simply ignored.

A question of principle

Humanity; independence, neutrality and impartiality – these principles are sacrosanct. They are the foundations of humanitarian aid and should protect relief workers, enabling

them to operate freely. The reality is very different, for various reasons.

One is ethnic and religious division and radicalisation, exacerbated by the globalisation of information. This sadly has led many people to think that the American volunteer in Afghanistan or the French doctor in Chad is no longer “neutral”.

We need to recognise, however, that a key reason for deliberate attacks on humanitarians may simply be that their role is not fully recognised and not differentiated from that of other actors. To those perpetrating the attacks, it has become increasingly difficult to identify what constitutes a genuine “humanitarian”.

How can humanitarian interventions be considered neutral if, in the same crisis, soldiers are carrying out “humanitarian” actions as well?

How is relief aid to be recognised as independent, when armed forces use aid agency emblems to deceive their opponents?

How can you be sure that humanitarian work is impartial when armies openly do similar work to win the hearts and minds of the inhabitants?

Some links between humanitarians and the military are essential as military logistics are often needed for large and rapid humanitarian interventions. However, this should not be regarded as the norm, and where links do exist, the respective roles should be clearly defined reflecting the particular circumstances. Ideally, they should be limited to non-conflict crises.

Confusing the roles

The confusion of roles puts humanitarian workers in danger, as well as the people they are assisting. Civilians face a double jeopardy: targeted themselves, and unable to obtain aid because the people trying to help them are denied access or, in extreme cases, killed in the course of their work.

Wherever professional humanitarian workers are associated in the minds of warring factions with a military, political or ruling power, they will be in danger.

It is therefore essential that all parties involved stick to the fundamentals and core mandates. They should respect the distinct and separate roles of the agencies involved, comply with international rules, abide by the principles of humanitarian law and defend the humanitarian space.

States should avoid integrating humanitarian activities into their political and military campaigns. This is best left to the professionals. Authorities must stop blocking humanitarian aid and provide access to victims when the needs are real and lives are in danger.

If neutral and independent agencies are denied access to victims, and intimidation is widespread, many people are doubly at risk of suffering.

Consensus

In recognition of these basic essentials, in 2006 the Commission proposed a “European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid”. The document was adopted in 2007 by the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council (representing all the EU Member States). The Consensus was established to defend the principles of humanitarian intervention and the rights of the victims. It focuses on ways of enabling humanitarian professionals to carry out their work around the world, assisting the millions of people who rely on European solidarity in times of need. It also highlighted the importance of protecting the humanitarian space.

With the adoption of this important document, a key aim is to roll back the tide of violence that engulfs so many people in crisis zones, as well as those trying to come to their assistance. The clear message is that everyone *must* respect the humanitarian space: this is vital to the survival of millions of innocent civilians.

Conference on Respect for International Humanitarian Law

“Acts of genocide, ethnic cleansing, forced displacement, indiscriminate attacks, rape. In my role as a politician, I am unfortunately in a “privileged” position to witness the unspeakable suffering inflicted on civilians in numerous armed conflicts”.

The conference on 16 September 2008 entitled “Respect for International Humanitarian Law: A major challenge; a global responsibility” was chaired by the European Commission and the European Parliament. Louis Michel, cited above, highlighted numerous abuses of international humanitarian law. The conference discussed the current alarming situation and looked at concrete ways of promoting respect for international humanitarian law. More than 450 people gathered in the Parliament chamber in Brussels to participate in the debate, that brought together leading political and humanitarian representatives.

The adoption of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid in 2007 was a crucial step in the process of reinforcing the legal tools and best practices to improve the implementation of international humanitarian law. Closing the conference, Commissioner Michel, who initiated the Consensus, reiterated the commitment of the Commission to work with all humanitarian actors, the Parliament and the Council to pursue the enforcement of international humanitarian law across the world.



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO:

More conflict in eastern provinces in 2008

The most pressing need in the DRC was to respond to the growing number of internally displaced people in the eastern provinces; people forced to leave their homes because of the intensified conflict between government troops and rebels. The Commission's humanitarian assistance addressed the most urgent needs of those affected by the renewed fighting but also covered people like Anne Mwasheke - whose suffering dates back more than ten years.

Anne does not like to talk about what happened to her over a decade ago. As in 2008, it was a period when conflict between government forces and rebel soldiers in the province of North Kivu raged around her. She has kept the traumatic events of one particular day bottled up for ten long years. It is only now that she feels she can talk about what happened thereby beginning the process of coming to terms with experiences that brought her to the edge of insanity.

"Rebel soldiers came to my house in Minova one morning in 1998. They stole all of our possessions. Then they took two of my brothers and five of our farm workers. They lined them up in the courtyard and shot them in cold blood as the rest of the family looked on. They were laughing. I lost consciousness and when I woke up the soldiers were gone."

The trauma of the deed perpetrated by rebel soldiers, which took just a few minutes, have haunted Anne Mwasheke ever since. "For more

than ten years I have had very bad headaches. I am nervous all the time, especially when I'm outside my house. Even the sound of children playing in the street scares me."

There is a name for her problem: post traumatic stress disorder. She only became aware it was curable when she was taken to the Centre Sosame, a specialist mental health facility in Bukavu, around 200km from her home.

Centre Sosame has seen many people like Anne Mwasheke. In a region, where numerous rebel groups have been fighting government troops over a period of two decades, the sort of atrocities that she experienced are tragically commonplace.

A hundred in-patients can be accommodated at the hospital and most of the time all the beds are full with people suffering a wide range of mental health symptoms almost all resulting from traumatic events. The most common group are those, like Anne Mwasheke, who have witnessed violent acts. There are those who have been directly caught up in the conflict - who have been raped, tortured or taken hostage. Others have suffered as a result of repeatedly having to flee their homes in fear of their lives.

Evariste Kajibwami runs the ergo-therapy programme at the centre which encourages patients to participate in activities like drawing, singing, craftwork, gardening and cooking. "The programme is effective because it allows patients to express their anxieties through the activity," said Evariste. "For example, we can learn a lot from drawings when patients find it difficult to express their feelings in words."

However, the challenge, according to him, is not finding the cure but locating those most in need. "Mental health problems are not readily recognised by most people, so we have to travel out to communities, find the most severe cases and bring them back to the centre for in-patient care."

After years of conflict, the demand for mental health services is growing. Centre Sosame is the only provider of these services in South Kivu, a province with a population of six million. Funding was provided for the Centre during 2008 by the Commission's Humanitarian Aid department.

Among the thousands of people affected physically and mentally by the ongoing conflict in the eastern DRC, Anne Mwasheke is one of the lucky ones. She is now talking about her experiences and her grief and anxiety is beginning to subside. Soon she will be able to return home - with the hope of putting the worst behind her and building a new life free of trauma.



MYANMAR: THE DAY CYCLONE NARGIS STRUCK

“I clung to a tree for six or seven hours”

On the evening of 2 May 2008, a category four storm struck Myanmar, sweeping through the Irrawaddy delta and the country's main city, Yangon. Nearly 140,000 people were killed, an estimated 2.4 million people were affected, and many lost their homes and livelihoods. Cyclone Nargis was the worst natural disaster in Myanmar's history.

Between May and December, funding totalling €39 million was provided by the Commission in a series of decisions. Support provided during the initial emergency phase benefited 1.4 million people in seven sectors: shelter, food, water, sanitation, health, nutrition, protection and logistics. Follow-up assistance includes early recovery and livelihood support for up to 850,000 people, and food assistance for around 500,000. As the Commission has a humanitarian office in Yangon, its experts were present in the stricken area from the early stages and they continue to monitor the situation closely.

Remarkable stories of survival in the delta can be found in every village. As in many natural disasters, the vulnerable – children, the elderly and women – were worst affected.

“Fortunately, we were together,” says the grateful husband of 23-year old Ma Shwe Zin who was seven months pregnant when Nargis swept through her village. “We were in the middle of the river when the storm started,” Ma Shwe Zin explains. “My husband and I thought we could escape the storm on the boat, but the winds got stronger and we were pushed into the shore. I clung to a tree for six or seven hours. The next day, my ribs hurt very badly,” she recalls, pointing to the side of her body.

Out of the devastation of Nargis, hope arrived some two months later when Ma Shwe – despite her terrible ordeal – gave birth to a healthy baby boy.

The villagers are concerned they still have a long road to recovery. Community leaders point out the continuing needs for adequate shelter, food, water supplies through the dry season and livelihood support. Ma Shwe Zin's husband explains: “We are farm labourers but have no land”. Like many in the delta, they depend on crop cultivation. “We have lost our tools and animals, so our paddy was not harvested,” says another far-

mer. Commission-funded food distributions and water projects provide an important lifeline as the people work to rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

Cyclone Nargis highlighted Myanmar's vulnerability to natural disasters and the crucial importance of disaster preparedness. Disaster risk reduction (DRR) measures have therefore been integrated into the Commission's latest humanitarian aid funding. Experience from Bangladesh, hit by the even more severe Cyclone Sidr in 2007, shows that where DRR activities were in place, the death toll was up to 50 times less than in similar areas struck by Cyclone Nargis. The post-cyclone period is the best time to raise awareness and integrate disaster risk reduction into early recovery actions.

The Commission has maintained a humanitarian office in Yangon since October 2005. Since 1994, it has funded relief programmes aimed at helping vulnerable groups in Myanmar itself and along the border in Thailand, where hundreds of thousands have been forced to flee their homes due to conflict between the army and ethnic minority groups.

As in all other crisis zones, the Commission's humanitarian aid is neutral – provided impartially by independent relief agencies to those who need it most.



HUMANITARIAN FUNDING BY COUNTRY, TERRITORY AND REGION

Afghanistan & Pakistan –

Funding €36.3 million

For the past two decades, Afghanistan has suffered the effects of conflict as well as being badly hit by successive droughts. During this period, more than eight million people, 20% of the population, took refuge in Pakistan and Iran. The return process, which began in 2002, continued in 2008 with more than 220,000 of the three million people still in exile going back to Afghanistan. These returnees, together with 235,000 internally displaced people, their host communities and other vulnerable groups, benefited from support under the Commission's €25 million humanitarian global plan for the country. The focus was on water/sanitation, basic hygiene, shelter and protection.

The Commission also provided food assistance in Afghanistan worth €9.8 million, assisting around 300,000 people with an emphasis on regions most affected by food insecurity.

In September, €1.5 million was allocated to aid up to 100,000 people displaced as a result of fighting in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province.

Bangladesh – Funding € 20.51 million

In November 2007, Bangladesh was hit by Cyclone Sidr, with winds of up to 240 km an hour. The damage was considerable: crops were flattened, livelihoods ruined and more than half a million homes destroyed. Three months on, the country was still dealing with the humanitarian consequences of the storm. Having provided more than €8 million for cyclone victims in 2007, the Commission followed up with a further €8 million for food aid

and strengthened food security and €4 million to meet urgent needs for shelter and sanitary installations. An additional €5 million was committed later in 2008 for shelter, livelihood support and the re-establishment of water supplies.

Annual monsoon rains also caused flooding and soil erosion in other parts of the country. The Commission responded by mobilising €1.5 million for flood victims in the badly-affected south-west.

€351,000 in food aid was provided for Rohingya refugees from Burma who were moved from the Tal refugee camp in 2008 to a more appropriate site (Leda).

The Commission also allocated an additional €1.65 million for food assistance to communities affected by an explosion in rat numbers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region. This phenomenon occurs approximately every 50 years when bamboo flowering takes place. The flowers and seeds provide a rich source of nutrition for normally cannibalistic rats, and with a three-month breeding cycle, the population burgeons. The rats then turn to devouring crops in fields and in storage, provoking critical food shortages. The problem also occurs in neighbouring India (Mizoram and Manipur) and Myanmar (Chin).

Bolivia – Funding €3 million

Bolivia experienced the worst floods in many decades. By mid-February, increasingly heavy rains were being reported throughout the country and especially in Santa Cruz and Beni, where river levels were rising rapidly. Despite a big effort by the authorities, local capacity was exceeded and the government called for international assistance. The Com-



Bihar floods

Large areas of India's Bihar State were under water after the Kosi River, also known as the 'River of Sorrow', breached flood defences in Nepal, changing its course and washing away crops, people and livestock in both countries.

Over 33 million people were impacted by the floods with an estimated four million displaced. Eighteen of Bihar's thirty eight districts were affected, five very severely.

The Commission quickly deployed teams to the worst-affected districts in Bihar to assess needs and determine how best to support the relief effort. The Commission committed a total of €6.5 million in humanitarian aid for flood victims in Bihar and Nepal.

"There are floods in Bihar every year because of the monsoon rains, but this year, they have been in different districts," said Mani Puri of OXFAM. "These communities have never seen floods on this scale before and so they were simply not prepared." OXFAM, one of the Commission's implementing partners, distributed jerry-cans, soap, blankets and tarpaulins to displaced people.

Other aid organisations also scaled up their humanitarian response, assisting flood victims with food, shelter, clean drinking water, medical assistance and basic hygiene items.

mission provided €2 million to help around 110,000 people living in the most severely affected areas. The funds were used for temporary shelters, distribution of safe drinking water, provision of household items, emergency primary health care and psychosocial support for displaced people.

In addition, a severe cold wave in the Andean highlands in Bolivia wrought damage to crops and natural pastures, seriously affecting the livelihoods of the most vulnerable people. The Commission allocated €1 million for food aid, targeting more than 30,000 people.

Burundi – Funding €16.6 million

For 2008, the Commission based its humanitarian assistance for Burundi and Burundian refugees in Tanzania on a joint global plan worth €20 million of which more than €11.1 million went to returnees and vulnerable communities inside Burundi. Living conditions remain difficult in a country which is still in a period of reconstruction and development after 12 years of armed conflict. The Commission also provided €5.5 million in food assistance targeting the elderly, the disabled, female-headed households, those suffering from HIV/AIDS and returnees from refugee camps in Tanzania.

Caucasus – Funding €11 million

The severity of the crisis in Chechnya and the associated humanitarian needs continued to diminish. As a result, the Commission was able to phase out its relief support in several sectors. Funding was focused on the most vulnerable households not included in state-sponsored actions with support going to displaced people and other groups at risk in Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan, as well as Chechens who had sought refuge in Azerbaijan. The areas covered were protection, shelter, rehabilitation, food security/livelihood, specialised care for handicapped people, and support for mother-and-child healthcare.

Cameroon – Funding €2 million

An influx of refugees from Chad and the Central African Republic led to a deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the north-east of the country. Commission funds helped cover the basic humanitarian needs of refugees and vulnerable host communities.

Caribbean (excluding Haiti)

Funding €2.55 million

The 2008 hurricane season was particularly severe in the Caribbean. During August and September, four major storms (Fay, Gustav, Hanna and Ike) struck in quick succession causing destruction in Haiti, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, the Bahamas, the Turks and Caicos and the Cayman Islands. An estimated one million people were affected by the end of the season, including many who were displaced and lost their homes. In addi-

tion to fast track funds provided for Haiti in September (see separate section on Haiti), an emergency decision for €5 million was adopted in October, after Hurricane Gustav, to assist around 250,000 people in the region. €2 million of this was earmarked for Cuba and €300,000 for the Bahamas, Jamaica and the Turks and Caicos. The remainder was for Haiti. The funds were spent on a wide range of relief activities including shelter, water/sanitation, health, food/nutrition, basic household items and livelihood support.

A €250,000 regional decision was also adopted to provide technical assistance for the Commission's humanitarian aid operations in the Caribbean region.

Central African Republic –

Funding €7.8 million

The people of the Central African Republic continued to suffer the effects of a decade of civil war and ongoing violence and instability. The Commission's humanitarian funding helped provide access to basic health services, clean water and education, and to boost the protection of vulnerable populations. Some small improvements in the situation were noted: for example, after nearly two years of displacement, a number of IDPs were able to return to their villages on a more permanent basis, thus reducing the number of those internally displaced to 108,000 by the end of the year. ECHO opened an office in Bangui in July to follow developments in the humanitarian situation more closely and play an active role in local coordination of relief efforts.

Chad – Funding €30 million

Chad continued to host huge numbers of refugees. Since 2003, 257,000 Sudanese from neighbouring Darfur have sought shelter in the border provinces of Ennedi, Wadi Fira, Ouaddaï and Dar Sila, and an estimated 57,000 Central African refugees have settled in Logone and Chari in southern Chad. In addition to the refugee caseload, there are 185,000 internally displaced people. The regions in the east that host the Darfur refugees are among the poorest in the country. Pockets of chronic food insecurity, coupled with a lack of basic resources and of adequate capacity to host such a large influx has added to the suffering of local communities. The Commission's support therefore extends to host communities as well as refugees and IDPs. Food assistance worth €13 million, represents nearly half of the Commission's relief effort (see also "Sahel").

China – Funding €2 million

China's worst earthquake in more than 30 years struck the Sichuan province on May 12, leaving more than 90,000 dead and around five million people homeless. The Commission provided €2 million in fast-track humanitarian funding to provide temporary shelter (tents) for people who had lost their homes.



Colombia – Funding €12.5 million

In recent years, an estimated 250,000 people have been displaced in Colombia annually because of the ongoing internal conflict. The Commission remains one of the key international humanitarian donors in the country, providing €12 million in its 2008 'global plan'. Its emphasis was on emergency humanitarian assistance, and protection for recently displaced people as well as for the conflict-affected rural population facing restrictions on movement and access to basic goods and services. The Commission provided support in areas where state assistance was insufficient or lacking altogether. Around 190,000 people benefited from the aid, including some 60,000 Colombians who have fled to neighbouring countries (Ecuador, Venezuela, Panama).

As Colombia is also prone to various natural disasters, part of the aid package was allocated for emergency assistance to conflict-affected people also severely affected by floods.

A further €500,000 was provided in food assistance to newly displaced people, and nutritional care. The most vulnerable were targeted, in particular children and mothers.

Democratic Republic of

Congo – Funding €53.55 million

While much of the country continued to stabilise and enjoy some modest growth, the eastern provinces of DRC relapsed into conflict during 2008, leading to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. The Commission's humanitarian assistance was a reflection of this contrasting situation - with nearly half of the funds allocated to the two Kivu regions in the east. A third of the overall funding (€15.5m) was for food aid, including food security programmes to help vulnerable people stay self-sufficient. In all, more than 2.5 million people benefited from humanitarian programmes supported by the Commission. It also continued to run a dedicated humanitarian air service called "ECHO Flight" in the DRC and Kenya, as many humanitarian projects can only be reached by air.

Ecuador – Funding €2 million

The "La Niña" phenomenon seriously exacerbated the impact of the 2008 rainy season in Ecuador. Floods affected 14 provinces, representing more than 50% of the territory. An estimated 360,000 people were directly affected.

The Commission provided €1.5 million in a funding decision targeting around 75,000 people living in the most severely affected provinces, with a focus on vulnerable groups and communities in the most remote areas. Components funded included water, sanitation and health actions as well as emergency repairs and local capacity-building.

€500,000 was also allocated for food aid and food security/livelihood support to flood affected communities.

Eritrea – Funding €4 million

Eritrea is confronted with huge challenges due to years of chronic drought, desertification, poor infrastructure and insecurity along the border with Ethiopia. The Commission's humanitarian aid targeted vulnerable people in rural areas around the country, focusing mainly on the provision of nutrition, water and sanitation, basic health services and agricultural and livelihood support (see also "Horn of Africa").

Ethiopia – Funding €23.5 million

Ethiopia is prone to recurrent droughts and floods, which have increased in frequency and intensity over the years. In 2008, a severe drought affected most of the country leading to a deteriorating nutritional situation. This was aggravated by high food commodity prices and soaring fuel prices. Around 6.4 million people required emergency food aid. The Commission responded by providing €19.5 million for emergency food distributions as well as for seeds, fertilisers and agricultural tools (see also "Horn of Africa"). An additional €4 million covered basic healthcare, water and sanitation, protection and support for refugees and IDPs.

Georgia/Russian Federation –

Funding €8 million

In early August, fighting broke out between the armed forces of Georgia and the Russian Federation in South Ossetia. On 9 August, the Georgian Parliament declared a "state of war". The military mobilisation, which included airstrikes and ground combat, affected the whole country. Renewed clashes also broke out in the Georgian breakaway province of Abkhazia. Many deaths were reported and thousands of people fled the fighting.

The Commission immediately allocated €1 million in fast-track funding to help internally displaced people (IDPs) inside Georgia with temporary shelter, food and items such as mattresses, bed linen, and kitchen and hygiene kits. Follow-up emergency funding of €5 million was also rapidly provided to meet basic needs and for the clearance of unexploded ordnance, mine risk education, trauma counselling and psychosocial support. Assistance was further boosted in a third funding decision towards the end of the year which focused on providing help to returning IDPs and the conflict-affected local communities over the winter period.

Guatemala and Honduras –

Funding €2.17 million

A tropical depression caused heavy rainfall throughout Central America, provoking floods and landslides. Honduras and Guatemala were particularly affected. Emergency assistance worth



€1.7 million was provided to more than 35,000 people living in the worst-affected areas of the two countries. The funds covered a range of support including food, water/sanitation, shelter, health and strengthening of disaster preparedness. There was also a food aid allocation of €1 million in Honduras to address the nutritional problems caused by drought and increased food prices. Support was provided to some 35,000 people, focusing on children. Part of the area covered by the drought response was also affected by the subsequent floods.

Guinea – Funding €1.3 million

Soaring global prices for food staples worsened the nutritional situation in many countries including Guinea. The Commission acted by providing food aid worth €1.3 million to the most vulnerable groups in the population (see also “Sahel” and “West Africa”).

Guinea Bissau – Funding €500,000

The Commission responded quickly to a cholera outbreak in Guinea Bissau with an emergency decision providing €500,000 to ensure control measures and adequate treatment of cases in the affected areas (see also “West Africa”).

Haiti – Funding €18.7 million

Haiti is emerging from a long period of political instability and has suffered serious environmental degradation. Chronic poverty is on the increase and many vulnerable people need humanitarian support. In 2007 the country was hit by a number of natural disasters, including Tropical Storms Noel and Olga, and was affected by serious flooding. A first humanitarian decision for €3 million was taken to help around 1.5 million vulnerable people across Haiti in the sectors of health, water and sanitation.

On 1 September, Tropical Storm Hanna brought massive rainfall to the country causing widespread floods. A fast track primary emergency decision for €2 million was adopted by the Commission to finance a wide range of interventions including food, water and sanitation, shelter, medical care and emergency telecommunications. In October, after Hurricane Gustav, a further €2.7 million was made available for Haiti through a regional emergency decision (for a total of €5 million – see also section on the Caribbean).

Even before hurricanes began to have a serious impact in 2008, between two and three million Haitians were already food insecure, with 23% of the population suffering from chronic malnutrition, and 4.5% from acute malnutrition. A specific response was needed to ensure immediate access to food for these people, and to restore their agricultural and livelihood capacities. Food assistance was provided from three funding decisions for a total of €11 million, with an estimated one million beneficiaries. The funds cover food security, nutrition and public health measures to reinforce good nutrition.

Horn of Africa – Funding €70.6 million

In addition to the Commission’s humanitarian aid to the individual countries in the Horn of Africa (worth around €100 million in total), it provided additional food assistance to vulnerable people in the region worth €40.6 million with beneficiaries in Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Uganda. The Commission also adopted a €30 million regional drought preparedness programme providing support to populations living in arid and semi-arid areas affected by drought for many years. The Horn of Africa is one of the world’s most vulnerable regions. Its food crisis has been caused by a combination of climatic shocks (in particular drought), local food inflation linked to high international prices, increased costs for fuel, transport and fertilisers and problems of poor security.

India and Nepal – Funding €18.456 million

On 18 August, the collapse of an embankment in Nepal caused the Kosi river, a tributary of the Ganges, to change course. Around a thousand villages in Nepal and the Indian state of Bihar were flooded. Up to 33 million people were affected, with four million displaced. More than 150,000 hectares of crops were destroyed. In a series of funding deployments, the Commission provided humanitarian and food assistance worth a total of €6.57 million (including €1.07m from resources already available that could be rapidly deployed). The focus was on water supplies, food, emergency shelter and first-aid distributed by partners.

Aside from the flooding, Nepal faced the continuing humanitarian consequences of the internal conflict that ended in 2006. Tens of thousands of displaced people were still awaiting reintegration into society, and this proved to be a slow and delicate process. During the year, there were further violent upsurges involving various groups in conflict with the authorities, as well as a growing food crisis. It was calculated that one child in two under the age of five was underweight, and in many rural areas, there was little or no access to basic healthcare and clean water. The Commission allocated €4.5 million in a humanitarian global plan for Nepal, to respond to these challenges.

€2.466 million was provided for food assistance to 100,000 Bhutanese refugees living in seven camps in Nepal, completely dependent on international aid.

In India, the Commission continued its funding for vulnerable civilians affected by the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir. €2 million was targeted for psycho-social support, protection and medical assistance.

Violence linked to Maoist insurgency in Chhattisgarh state generated relief needs among civilians for which €850,000 was provided, principally for medical assistance via mobile clinics, and hygiene education.

€3.14 million was allocated for food assistance in India during the year. €624,000 of this was deployed for the Bihar floods (see above) and the rest to



address the consequences of crop destruction by rodents in Mizoram, linked to bamboo flowering that occurs in cycles of around 50 years (see also “Bangladesh”).

Indonesia – Funding €2 million

East Nusa Tenggara, with a population of 4.2 million, is one of the poorest provinces of Indonesia. It was struck by a series of droughts between 2002 and 2007, with people increasingly unable to recover from one shock before the next one hit. The Commission’s funding supported highly vulnerable families faced with food shortages and loss of livelihoods. Its aim was to restore their coping capacities while seeking to introduce positive and sustainable behaviour changes.

Activities funded included food and cash for work, various forms of livelihood assistance (seeds, tools, rehabilitation of fields and restoration of drainage and irrigation systems), water and sanitation projects and promotion of improved childcare.

Iraq – Funding €30 million

Iraq’s civilian population was severely affected by the conflict and subsequent instability linked with the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime in 2003. The civil war, during which many killings occurred and violence was widespread, led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, both inside the country and to neighbouring states.

In 2008, the Commission provided €30 million to meet the continuing and substantial humanitarian needs. The focus was on water, basic food, food security, health and psychosocial support.

Latin America (regional) –

Funding €2 million

Between 1997 and 2007, 546 natural disasters occurred in Central and South America, affecting a total of 47 million people. 13.7 million Latin Americans were affected by drought and 12.5 million by floods. The trend over the last decade has been gradually upwards with more disasters occurring and more people being affected. The cumulative humanitarian impact of so-called “small scale” disasters (those that involve a relatively limited number of people, do not automatically trigger a declaration of emergency and do not feature prominently in the news) can be very serious for already vulnerable populations. To address the needs, the Commission adopted a “Small Scale Disasters” Decision for €1 million. The funds are used to cover the emergency needs of vulnerable people affected by small-scale natural disasters in the 15 Latin American countries.

A trend related to the increase in natural disasters is the increasing threat posed by outbreaks of communicable diseases. Global warming also enhances the growth of tropical pathogens and vectors. The Commission allocated €1 million to help tackle epidemics in Latin America and the Caribbean. Its aim was to assist the fight against four major diseases - dengue, malaria, yellow fever and leptospirosis - mainly by enhancing preparedness and response capacity but also by responding quickly to outbreaks. Ten priority countries have been identified on the basis of their vulnerability and insufficient response capacity. Funds made available under this decision are used to reduce morbidity and mortality rates linked to disease outbreaks in their early stages, for example through emergency planning, management of vaccines and pharmaceutical stocks, vector control and early warning systems.



The occupied Palestinian territory

The critical humanitarian situation in the West Bank and Gaza continued, in a context of increasing fragmentation and isolation. The Palestinians’ growing dependency on international aid and the unremitting deterioration of their socio-economic situation added substantially to the complexity of this protracted crisis.

Against this already negative backdrop, the periodical spikes in violence only served to worsen the desperate living conditions of many Palestinian people. This was particularly the case in Gaza where major hostilities broke out towards the end of December.

Funds allocated by the international community, including the European Commission, helped to bring vital relief to people affected by the crisis. However, the limits of humanitarian aid in this situation are also evident. A definitive end to the suffering can only be achieved through a durable political settlement.

Kenya – Funding €15.5 million

The Commission continued its support for drought-hit communities in northern Kenya (see also “Horn of Africa”). It also provided emergency aid to at least 120,000 vulnerable people affected by the post-election violence, mainly IDPs and their host communities. The Commission’s aid package for Kenya included €5.5 million in humanitarian aid and €10 million in food assistance (as well as €8 million from a regional food aid decision – see “Horn of Africa”). Food aid beneficiaries also included refugees in the country, mainly from Somalia. The “ECHO Flight” service (see text on Democratic Republic of Congo) enabled humanitarian personnel and supplies to be transported to remote areas of the country.

Liberia – Funding €16.6 million

Despite positive developments, Liberia still requires humanitarian assistance as the government builds its capacity to take over from international agencies. For most of the population, access to drinking water, healthcare, sanitation, shelter and livelihood opportunities remains very limited. A particular objective of the Commission’s humanitarian aid, as in previous years, was to help tackle the ongoing problem of gender-based violence (see also “West Africa”).

Madagascar – Funding €1.5 million

Cyclone Ivan hit Madagascar on 17 February. The Commission reacted speedily, providing emergency relief assistance for up to 210,000 people affected by the storm itself and subsequent flooding (see also “Southern Africa/Indian Ocean” and “Disaster risk reduction”, p. 19)

Mauritania – Funding €2 million

The European Commission supported the voluntary return of Mauritanian refugees mainly from Senegal but also from Mali. Through its Sahel plan, the Commission also funded projects tackling malnutrition in Mauritania (see “Sahel” and “West Africa”).

Moldova – Funding €700,000

In 2007, Moldova, one of the poorest countries in Europe, experienced its worst drought for more than half a century. Agriculture was particularly badly hit with a big reduction in productivity and crop yields. In 2008, the Commission provided follow-up support for the rural population worst affected by the drought. The funding was mainly used to purchase seeds for farmers.

Myanmar – Funding €39 million

Cyclone Nargis struck Myanmar in early May, killing an estimated 140,000 people and affecting 2.4

million others. Economic activity including the farming and fishing sectors, were seriously disrupted. Initially, relief agencies encountered difficulties in obtaining permission to access the stricken Irrawaddy Delta region. Louis Michel, European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and senior UN figures visited Myanmar immediately after the tragedy, where they emphasised the impartiality, neutrality and independence of international humanitarian aid. With improved access, the Commission was able to fund substantial relief efforts through a rolling programme of humanitarian decisions for the victims of Cyclone Nargis. €17 million was provided for the initial emergency phase targeting the basic needs of the stricken population. Follow-up funding of €22 million was focused on meeting ongoing humanitarian needs and providing for early recovery and livelihood support (see also the feature on page 7). The presence of Commission humanitarian experts in the country facilitated the task.

Elsewhere in Myanmar, the Commission continued helping vulnerable populations affected by the low-intensity conflict in border areas (Northern Rakhine, Shan, Mon and Kayah states). Assistance focused on food, nutrition, protection, primary health care and water/sanitation. Support to Burmese refugees in camps in Thailand, who are almost entirely dependent on international aid, was maintained with an emphasis on healthcare, nutrition water/sanitation and strengthened donor coordination.

Namibia – Funding €350,000

Namibia’s government declared a state of emergency in early March after severe flooding in the north and north-east of the country displaced thousands of people and caused outbreaks of cholera and diarrhoea. The Commission provided €350,000 to support the emergency response.

The Palestinians – Funding €82.7 million

The Commission supported operations benefiting Palestinians in the occupied Palestinian territory, and Palestine refugees in Lebanon including victims of the fighting in and around the Nahr el Barred refugee camp.

The bulk of the funds, €73.2 million, went to operations in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in the following sectors: food assistance; health; water and sanitation; cash-for-work; protection; psychosocial support, and co-ordination. Substantial support was provided for activities targeting beneficiaries affected by the construction of the barrier on Palestinian land in the West Bank. In contrast to previous years’ programmes, the majority of the funding - 56% of the overall budget for the occupied Palestinian territory - was channelled to operations in the Gaza Strip. At the end of December, Commission humanitarian staff and resources were mobilised rapidly in response to the military escalation of the Gaza crisis.

For Palestinian refugees in Lebanon (€9.5 million), the Commission helped to improve the quality of secondary health services provided to the most vulnerable Palestinian refugees by hospitals managed by the Palestinian Red Crescent Society. It was also involved in boosting access to clean water supplies in Southern Lebanon. As for the situation in the Nahr el Bared camp, ongoing relief efforts mitigated some of the worst effects of the 2007 crisis, ensuring access to shelter, food, water and sanitation, basic infrastructures, health needs (including psycho-social support) and other services for the affected families.

Paraguay – Funding €1.4 million

Since 2002, the Chaco region in Paraguay has experienced consistent and severe rain deficits, leading to a worsening situation for highly vulnerable groups. Commission humanitarian funding targeted up to 25,000 people in the central Chaco region facing serious water shortages. There was a particular emphasis on indigenous communities and indigenous children. The funds covered the restoration of basic access to water, support for sanitation and hygiene and the provision of key assets (such as water tanks, pumping systems and water system maintenance kits). In addition to tackling immediate needs, the aim was to boost local resilience to future climate-induced shocks.

Peru – Funding €1 million

A cold wave in Peru damaged crops and natural pastures, seriously affecting the livelihoods and food security of the most vulnerable communities living high in the Andes. The situation was exacerbated by high food prices, lower alpaca meat and wool prices and lower crop yields. A silent disaster unfolded as seeds became increasingly scarce, natural grazing areas deteriorated and animals began dying in the bitter cold of malnutrition and respiratory complications.

€1 million was made available through a food aid decision to support 45,000 of the most vulnerable subsistence and alpaca farmers. The focus was on safeguarding availability of and access to food.

Philippines – Funding €6.5 million

The failure of a putative agreement between the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the Philippines Government triggered a violent reaction by what was reported to be renegade factions of the MILF. This was followed by retaliation from the Philippines armed forces. The fighting led to a massive displacement of civilian populations and, as the conflict spread across several provinces of western Mindanao, more people fled their home areas in search of safety. Responding to the growing civilian casualties and human displacement, the Commission adopted two humanitarian decisions. The aim was to meet the basic humanitarian needs of up to half a million people affected

by the internal conflict, including more than 370,000 who had been displaced. The funds were used for a range of relief activities and supplies including emergency food distribution, drinking water, sanitation, essential household equipment, shelter and healthcare.

Sahel – Funding €15.7 million

Persistent malnutrition and food insecurity are among the greatest challenges in the Sahel region, affecting people who are already extremely susceptible to poverty and external shocks such as droughts and floods. Recognising the severity of the problem, the Commission continued providing humanitarian and food aid to vulnerable people in five countries in the Sahel: Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger as well as in the Sahel zones of Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Nigeria and Togo. With food aid worth €10.7 million, the Commission responded to short-term nutritional needs, aggravated by the sharp price rises for staple foods on local, regional and world markets. €5 million was used to top up the 2007 global humanitarian aid plan for the Sahel, pro-actively helping local communities to manage external shocks better. This included, for example, support for moderately malnourished children that had a significant impact on reducing acute malnutrition and mortality rates. The Commission also recognised that the problem of malnutrition is multifaceted. Families need to be assisted in improving their overall coping mechanisms, for example, through access to healthcare and clean water.

Somalia – Funding €34.79 million

The conflicts that have raged in Somalia over the past 17 years have had a devastating impact on the population. The situation has been aggravated by worsening cyclical droughts, floods and epidemic outbreaks. People's coping mechanisms are largely exhausted and clan-based violence has made it difficult to deliver humanitarian aid. The Commission, which has been funding relief assistance in Somalia throughout the conflict, continued to address core needs to ensure the survival of the most marginalised groups in society. Commission-funded aid activities included shelter, health and nutrition, emergency food aid and food security, the provision of basic household items, and co-ordination of relief efforts (see also "Horn of Africa").

Southern Africa/Indian

Ocean – Funding €8.5 million

The Commission adopted its first action plan to reduce the impact of future catastrophes in south-east Africa and the south-west Indian Ocean – one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world. The €5 million action plan covered activities in Comoros, Madagascar, Malawi and Mozambique. The focus is on supporting local communities and



institutions to prepare for and mitigate the effects of natural disasters, by enhancing their coping capacity (see also “Disaster risk reduction”).

The Commission also provided €3.5 million in food aid to people in need in Madagascar, Mozambique and Namibia as well as to vulnerable Zimbabwean refugees and migrants in neighbouring countries.

Sri Lanka – Funding €19 million

In January, the precarious truce in place since 2002 between the government and the LTTE (Tamil Tigers) came to an end. The conflict, which began a quarter of a century before, had already claimed 70,000 lives with a million people uprooted. The resumption of fighting led to a sharp increase in casualties and new waves of displacement. An estimated 570,000 people fled their homes. The Indian state of Tamil Nadu continued to host around 100,000 Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka.

The Commission provided €14 million through its humanitarian global plan to help displaced people, refugees and host populations as well as people caught up in conflict zones. The funds were used mainly for food aid, improved food security, shelter, basic household items, healthcare, water/sanitation and demining. It also allocated €3 million for food assistance.

During the year, NGOs providing food for most of the affected population were prevented from entering the Vanni region, the main conflict zone. Only the ICRC and the WFP had continued access to the area. The Commission deployed €2 million in emergency funding to help these agencies continue their essential relief work.

Sudan – Funding €167 million

Sudan was again the country with the largest relief aid allocation from the European Commission. €81 million was provided in humanitarian funding and €86 million in food assistance. This large amount was necessary to save lives and stabilise the living conditions of up to 6.5 million vulnerable people. The Commission’s global humanitarian aid plan for 2008 covered the whole of the country. However, the focus was clearly on Darfur with its 2.5 million IDPs, 2 million local residents (including nomads) and 45,000 Chadian refugees – all of whom depended on external aid for their survival. Violence and food insecurity prompted thousands of new displacements every month, aid workers came increasingly under attack and getting aid through to people in need became ever more challenging.

In South Sudan, the Commission continued to assist former refugees and IDPs returning home after the conclusion of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the north and the south. It also provided support for the most vulnerable communities facing serious threats to their survival.

Throughout Sudan, the Commission supported activities aimed at reducing mortality linked to disease outbreaks, natural disasters (in particular drought and floods) and new conflicts. Because of the logistically challenging context and the increased risks of delivering humanitarian aid, in particular in Darfur, funding was also used for common services such as humanitarian air transport, coordination among the aid agencies, and non-food item pipelines, as well as to maintain an adequate level of technical assistance in the field.

Suriname – Funding €400,000

At the end of May, heavy rains caused serious flooding in the southern provinces of Suriname, destroying crops, homes and livelihoods. A Commission’s assessment mission showed the need for urgent food assistance to flood victims.

Using food assistance funds, the Commission provided relief for around 3,000 families in the form of emergency food and short-term food security, nutritional and livelihood support.

Tajikistan – Funding €750,000

In 2008, the country experienced an unusually severe winter, the coldest in 25 years. Abnormal snowfall occurred across the country leaving many communities isolated. The impact of these conditions on vulnerable people was particularly acute, with young children and the elderly particularly affected. The funding, targeting around 60,000 people, was used to repair damaged water and sanitation facilities, and to provide essential items including seeds, animal feed, fuel and generators.

Tanzania – Funding €10.86 million

For 2008, the Commission developed a joint global humanitarian aid plan for Burundi and Tanzania (focusing on Burundian refugees) worth €20 million. €8.86 million was provided to assist around 110,000 refugees still living in camps in the north-west of Tanzania at the beginning of the year. The aid covered water and sanitation, basic healthcare, nutrition, housing, protection and transport. An additional €2 million was provided in the form of food aid. The Commission also helped in the voluntary repatriation of refugees and their reintegration inside Burundi (see also “Burundi”).

Timor-Leste – Funding €2 million

In May 2006, violent unrest in Timor-Leste led to the displacement of 150,000 people. Following the death of rebel leader, Alfredo Reinado, in the February 2008 attack on the President and Prime Minister, the security situation improved, opening the way to the return of IDPs to their homes. A sustainable solution for the voluntary transparent return of the IDPs was drawn up. The main basic needs were for practical multi-sectoral assistance



for the displaced people remaining in camps and transitional shelters. The Commission's funding was aimed at supporting remaining IDPs as well as assisting returnees with transport and logistics, protection, social integration measures and food packages covering the requirements for each family for two months.

This financial decision should be the last humanitarian intervention by the Commission in response to the 2006 crisis. There is now a clear shift towards longer term recovery activities.

Uganda – Funding €19.5 million

The Commission remained one of the main humanitarian donors in Uganda in 2008, addressing the impact of the 20-year conflict between the government and the 'Lord's Resistance Army' in the north, and the impact of drought and floods in the country (see also "Horn of Africa") The focus was on vulnerable populations and, in particular on children. €5.5 million was allocated for food aid and livelihood recovery assistance to internally displaced people and refugees. The aim was to prevent their nutritional status from deteriorating and bolster the return process. In the north-eastern Karamoja region, the Commission's drought preparedness initiative supported pastoral communities by rehabilitating traditional water systems and strengthening livestock health management. Funding was also made available to combat diseases such as hepatitis E.

Vietnam and Laos – Funding €2.5 million

At the end of 2007, Typhoon Lekima made landfall in Vietnam, provoking floods and significant damage to infrastructure. Subsequent heavy monsoon rains led to further serious inundations. Emergency funding was already provided by the Commission in 2007 to meet the immediate basic needs of people affected by Lekima, and this was

followed up with a €1 million decision early in 2008 to provide early recovery assistance.

In August 2008, Tropical Storm Kammuri hit the coastal areas of Vietnam and then weakened into a tropical depression that produced torrential rains and flooding in the northern and north-central provinces of Vietnam and Laos. An estimated 93,000 people in Vietnam and 204,000 in Laos were affected. €1.5 million was allocated to assist victims and help them regain their livelihoods speedily. The focus was on rice distribution, emergency rehabilitation of fields and irrigation systems, provision of seeds, fertilisers and other agricultural inputs, and the distribution of hygiene kits, household kits and basic school materials. Three emergency operations were undertaken in Vietnam and two in Laos, in response to Kammuri.

West Africa – Funding €3 million

Communicable diseases and epidemics are more frequent in West Africa than anywhere else in the world. The region accounts for 20% of the world's epidemic alerts. Disease outbreaks pose great risks to the health, lives and livelihoods of many people in the region with the increasing danger of cross-border infection. The Commission has supported emergency operations to tackle epidemics, including vaccination campaigns, throughout the world for many years. The aim is generally to prevent small initial outbreaks from escalating. In 2008, it supported the vaccination of 550,000 people in Liberia against yellow fever and of 280,000 in Niger and Nigeria against meningitis, as well as providing treatment against measles. It also supported the fight against malaria throughout western Africa by funding the distribution of mosquito nets and the treatment of people with the disease, especially children.



Sri Lanka

The escalation of the war in north-east Sri Lanka during 2008 affected, over half a million civilians living in the area. On top of the severe casualties and the thousands of displaced, up to 250,000 people found themselves trapped in the ever-diminishing conflict zone, because of restrictions imposed by the LTTE (Tamil Tigers) and the lack of secure escape routes to safer areas.

The situation deteriorated dramatically from September 2008 when the government of Sri Lanka requested the UN and international organisations to withdraw from the conflict area for security reasons, leaving hundreds of thousands of people with little or no access to humanitarian assistance. ICRC was the only organisation allowed to remain.

The European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, Louis Michel, expressed his deep concerns on various occasions and issued strong calls to both parties to comply with international humanitarian law, to ensure that relief reaches people in need and to allow civilians to relocate in safer areas.

Western Sahara refugees in Algeria – Funding €10 million

The Commission continued to fund humanitarian assistance to Sahrawi refugees who have been living in four camps in the arid region of Tindouf in Western Algeria for 33 years. Harsh climatic conditions and an absence of resources mean that these people depend heavily on international aid for their survival. The Commission funds contributed to securing basic food supplies, tackling nutritional problems, ensuring access to water, sanitation and health, and covering other needs such as shelter and education. Specific assistance for handicapped and elderly people was also maintained.

Yemen – Funding €2.1 million

Yemen, one of the poorest countries in the world, has experienced several humanitarian crises. In 2008, the Commission helped more than 20,000 victims of the floods that occurred in October, and provided continuing support for the 11,000 refugees from the Horn of Africa (mainly Somalia) in the Kharaz camp. The Commission also channelled support through the ICRC to around 80,000 people affected by the internal conflict that has persisted since 2004. The funds were used to provide shelter, food aid and basic healthcare, as well as sustainable access to clean drinking water and basic sanitation facilities.

Zimbabwe – Funding €25 million

Zimbabwe's profound crisis, which worsened during the year, had many aspects: poor governance, an economy in freefall, an HIV/AIDS pandemic, food insecurity and erratic weather conditions. In 2008 a disastrous cholera outbreak offered further tragic evidence of the state of a country in which basic services such as public health, water supply and sewage systems had all collapsed. By the end of the year, the disease had spread to all provinces with nearly 33,000 reported cases and 1,622

deaths. The Commission was already funding humanitarian activities to prevent and mitigate the possible occurrence of water-borne diseases before the outbreak occurred. This involved activities such as the rehabilitation of boreholes and water points, the provision of vital medicines and medical supplies, the supply of hygiene and sanitation items and the establishment of cholera treatment centres. When the epidemic began in early August, the Commission moved quickly with further support for partner agencies to manage health treatment and water/sanitation activities.

The Commission's global humanitarian aid plan for Zimbabwe was aimed at mitigating as far as possible the impact of the socio-economic breakdown by boosting the access of vulnerable populations to basic social services.

Food assistance worth €15 million was provided, as the economic collapse had greatly reduced the amount of food being produced locally and hyperinflation left imported food beyond the reach of most Zimbabweans.

Capacity building

Since 2002, more than €120 million has been committed to UN agencies and international organisations through capacity-building programmes, previously known as thematic funding. Activities included stockpiling, preparedness, training, information management, logistics and boosting "surge capacity" (deploying resources rapidly to meet a sudden increase in needs).

In 2008, a renewed and integrated "Capacity Building Programme" was developed by the Commission. It covers key areas of intervention and cross-cutting priorities such as the sustainability of actions, the positive impact on other humanitarian organisations (especially NGOs), the inclusion of other donors and the building of local capacity. The policy, to be finalised and adopted in 2009, is geared towards strengthening the overall humanitarian response with an expected positive impact on millions of people caught up in crises every year.

A renewed partnership: one year on

To ensure the delivery of high quality humanitarian aid, the European Commission funds NGOs, UN agencies and members of the Red Cross/Crescent 'family' who have signed a partnership agreement with the Commission. Partnership is not a static relationship: it needs successfully to tackle the evolving challenges of humanitarian aid. That is why a new set of agreements and implementing modalities entered into force on 1 January 2008. The Commission adopted these instruments to improve delivery of humanitarian aid in the field by:

- strengthening the results-based approach of humanitarian actions;
- promoting a qualitative partnership that takes better account of the partners' diversity;
- clarifying and, where possible, simplifying rules and procedures.

The experience, after a year of operation, is encouraging. Important progress has been made towards more results-driven delivery of humanitarian aid – an approach that lies at the heart of the Commission's policy for the relief actions it finances. The diversity and wide range of partners goes hand-in-hand with better accountability. During 2008, DG ECHO has also done a lot to clarify rules and procedures by preparing an important set of supporting documents and launching a substantial programme of training for all those involved on both sides of the partnership.

FOOD ASSISTANCE: BIG INCREASE IN NEEDS

Since 2007, food aid, including emergency food aid, has been an integral part of the mandate of the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department, which has become one of the major donors of food aid in the world.

In 2008, the situation in Darfur, Zimbabwe and the occupied Palestinian territory continued to worsen. In addition, all humanitarian donors were confronted with the surge in prices of basic food aid products and oil. The cost of responding to needs escalated significantly. The European Commission's emergency food assistance budget was therefore almost doubled, with additional resources drawn from the Emergency Aid Reserve. At the end of the year, €363.25 million had been allocated for food aid, allowing help to reach more than 25 million people.

Two major food aid funding decisions totalling €160 million (boosted later to €220 million) and €57.25 million respectively complemented global humanitarian aid plans and country-based decisions.

The first decision in February provided €160 million. This was one of the largest ever humanitarian decisions launched by the Commission. The aim was to support the most vulnerable people facing food shortages due to natural catastrophes, economic and political crises, and armed conflicts. Seventeen priority locations were established – Afghanistan, Burundi, Chad, Colombia, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Nepal, the occupied Palestinian territory, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe and the Sahel (covering Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger) and the funding was predicted to reach around 18.7 million people. Beneficiaries included refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs) and host communities in areas affected by population displacement. This decision

was boosted in July by €60 million, to take into account the rising cost of food and the growing needs across the globe.

A special package of €6 million was provided in April for Bangladesh to give further assistance to victims of Cyclone Sidr and, the second overall decision of the year for €57.25 million was taken in July. This funding was again to provide appropriate and adequate food aid in situations of food shortage and to support short-term measures to improve food security and restore livelihoods in Sudan, Ethiopia, Central African Republic, West Africa (Sahel region), Algeria (Sahrawi refugees) and Haiti.

Projects included:

- Distribution of food to distressed populations in the aftermath of natural disasters, epidemics, sudden economic crises or armed conflicts;
- Assistance for the nutritional recovery of vulnerable groups in both sudden and protracted crises, specifically targeting children under five and their mothers;
- "Food for work" activities allowing the provision of food aid to be combined with re-establishing rural community assets and self-sufficiency; and
- Restoring basic livelihoods of vulnerable people returning home or resettling after a crisis. Activities included short-term support for family food production, for example through the distribution of seeds, tools and fertilisers, and the diversification of food resources.

A new emergency decision of €15 million for food assistance in the Horn of Africa was announced in October. The food crisis there had been caused by a combination of climatic shocks (in particular drought), local food inflation linked to high international prices, increased costs for fuel, transport and fertilisers, and growing insecurity. The funding benefited such countries as Ethiopia, Somalia, Kenya, Uganda and Djibouti.

Other individual funding decisions were taken in the final months of the year to include Nepal, Bolivia, Myanmar, the occupied Palestinian territory, Haiti and Sudan. The six largest recipients of Commission food assistance were Sudan (€86 million), the occupied Palestinian territory (€52.76 million), Ethiopia (€19.5 million), DR Congo (€15.5 million), Zimbabwe (€15 million) and Somalia (€14 million).

Funds were channelled through the UN partners, non-governmental organisations and the Red Cross/Crescent agencies with the UN's World Food Programme receiving a major share of the total EC food aid budget.



DISASTER PREPAREDNESS/ DISASTER RISK REDUCTION: Commission support for “people-centred” initiatives



Around 97% of all natural disaster-related deaths occur in developing countries and in terms of socio-economic losses, those most affected live in the poorest and thus most vulnerable communities.

Hazards such as earthquakes, floods, flash floods, drought, landslides, volcanic eruptions, extreme temperatures and forest fires are impossible to avert. However, their negative impact can often be reduced or prevented. The Commission is committed to improving the capacities of populations at risk to better prepare and protect themselves. Its Humanitarian Aid department has funded community-based activities since 1996 through its disaster preparedness programme called DIPECHO. The Commission has also increased its efforts more systematically to include disaster risk reduction in its humanitarian aid responses and has expanded its activity to include preparing for “slow-onset” disasters such as drought.

The DIPECHO programme targets those communities and their institutions that face the greatest risk from natural hazards and have low coping capacities. The focus is on “people-centred” initiatives to increase the populations’ resilience and to reduce their vulnerability in the event of a disaster. Lives and livelihoods can be saved if local communities and institutions are better prepared and can respond quickly and adequately.

An additional aim of the programme is to promote disaster risk reduction measures by improving the flow of information exchange, and the documentation of “lessons learned” and best practices. These can then be replicated and scaled up by governments and development agencies.

In 2008 the DIPECHO programme was expanded to include South East Africa & the South West Indian Ocean for the first time. Four funding decisions were launched:

Central America (€10m)

Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama

Central Asia (€7.325m)

Fifth Action Plan includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

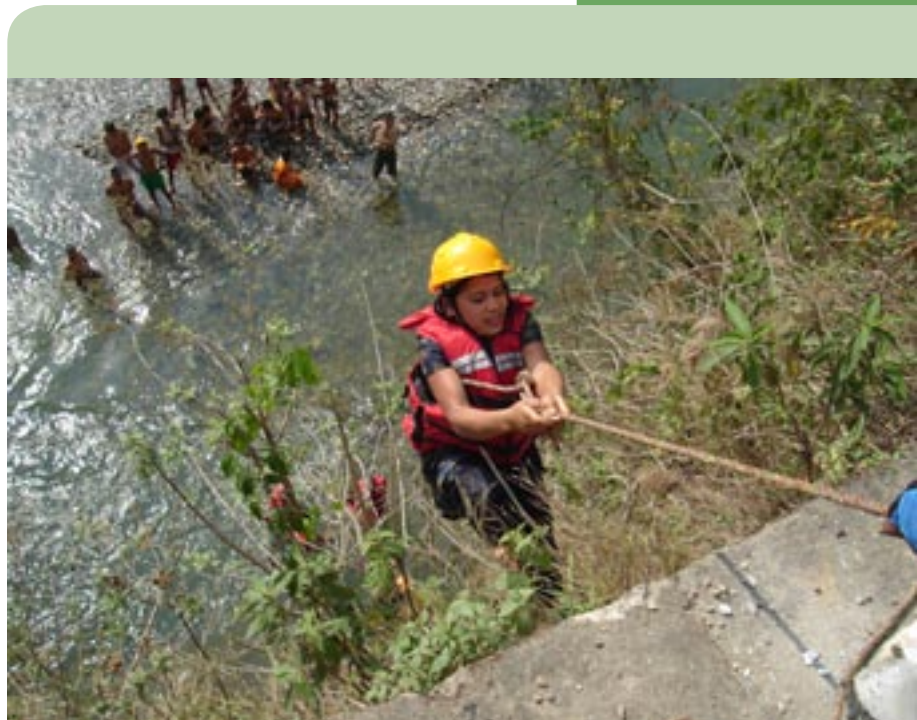
South East Africa & South West Indian Ocean (€5m)

First Action Plan includes Comoros, Malawi, Madagascar and Mozambique

South East Asia (€10m)

Sixth Action Plan includes Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, the Philippines, East Timor and Vietnam and, through regional initiatives, Burma/Myanmar and Thailand

It is also worth highlighting the promotion activities and coordination carried out with development actors, other international and regional stakeholders, and local and national authorities. These are designed to ensure complementarity of policies and practices at all levels of disaster risk reduction.



GEORGIA: A fast response to a sudden conflict

On 7 August 2008, conflict erupted in South Ossetia, involving Georgian and Russian forces. After a few days of fighting, Russian troops advanced deep into Georgia. The situation deteriorated further with renewed fighting in the Georgian breakaway province of Abkhazia, as well as in other areas, particularly in and around the city of Gori. Tens of thousands of civilians fled the fighting. An estimated 30,000 crossed the border into North Ossetia, inside the Russian Federation. The Commission announced a fast-track aid package of €1 million in humanitarian aid on 9 August followed by a further €5 million in relief assistance for people affected by the conflict.

By the end of 2008, the violence had passed. However, without a political resolution, the humanitarian situation remained unpredictable. While most of the estimated 133,500 people in Georgia who were forced to flee were able to return home, around 37,500 remained displaced during the winter, and up to 25,000 of these faced the prospect of a longer period of exile from their home areas. The human costs of the conflict were consi-

derable in other ways as well. Unexploded ordnance (bombs, mines and shells) in areas where there had been fighting had to be cleared before people could return safely to their places of origin and recommence farming. Items such as warm clothes, firewood, hygiene kits and household utensils were lacking. Protection and trauma support were also needed.

Abkhazia, in Western Georgia, continued to be confronted by largely forgotten humanitarian needs. The conflict that erupted in 1992 in the breakaway Republic led to the displacement of more than 250,000 people. A UN-brokered agreement was signed by the Georgian and Abkhaz parties in 1994, putting an end to the fighting, but the situation remained tense with the population having shrunk from an estimated 500,000 people to around 150,000. Many of those remaining were destitute. In the last 15 years, around 45,000 ethnic Georgians have returned to their homes in Abkhazia, and as a result of the 2008 conflict, these people faced new uncertainties from both a humanitarian and a protection standpoint.



DROUGHT PREPAREDNESS IN THE HORN OF AFRICA: Camels offer solutions

In 2006, the Commission launched a preparedness programme for people living in drought-prone areas. The programme was given a boost in 2008 with a further €30 million for the Greater Horn of Africa, covering the drought-prone countries of Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia and Uganda.

Nowadays, many parts of the region are confronted with serious drought every three to five years: in the past it was once every eight to ten years. The problems created by climate change – increasingly unreliable weather patterns, less rain overall and desertification – are aggravated by population growth and conflict. The latter often means that pastoralists lose access to the best pastures, leading to the death of many animals and growing demand for food aid.

It is often assumed that people are largely helpless in the face of drought but, in fact, communities throughout the Horn of Africa are developing their own solutions. In some cases, it means learning new skills and adapting traditional farming practices.

For example, farmers are moving away from traditional forms of pastoralism and replacing cattle with camels: the only animals that can survive a sustained drought.

One component of the Commission's drought preparedness programme is a modest but potentially significant pilot project that involves supplying camels to pastoralists. Camel milk is a delicacy that fetches a good price: a litre sells for around 75 Kenyan shillings (€0.72). Also, once the animals start reproducing, the benefits spread to the wider community.

Two three-year-old camels forage for leaves on a hillside in Moyale district on Kenya's northern border with Ethiopia. They are owned by 54 year-old Galgolo Huka. He looks after the two female animals, knowing that they can provide for his family and community for many years to come. They represent both a new beginning for this father of five, and a throwback to his former life. "I used to own 70 cattle which I grazed on this same hill, but I lost all of them in the 1984 drought," he explained. "Since then, I have been a day labourer - but this is a precarious way to support my family."

The camels are still young, but once they reach maturity in a year's time, they should provide a secure income for the rest of their 30-40 year lifespan - through the milk they provide and the offspring they produce.

"I am hopeful these two animals will change my life," says Galgolo Huka. "I will be able to send my children to school, to buy them clothes and always have food to eat." He

adds: "I have not had this security since I owned cattle."

He is one of six farmers in Teso village who received a pair of camels under the Commission's drought preparedness programme. He and the other farmers were chosen by village elders as they were among the poorest in the community and were most likely to reap the greatest benefits.

Camels do not come cheap - each animal costs around 25,000 Kenya shillings (€240) - but it is a worthwhile investment. These "ships of the desert" provide a real chance for a sustainable existence, making people less likely to have to rely on food aid. If the pilot project goes well, more camels could be given to other communities.

In addition to its efforts to boost the capacity of communities to cope with drought over the medium to longer term, the Commission, through its Humanitarian Aid department, provided substantial funding to meet immediate food aid needs in the Horn of Africa during 2008.





ZIMBABWE: Having the Courage to beat cholera

Three and a half year old Courage will have to live up to his name if he is to survive the cholera epidemic that is raging through the small Zimbabwean town of Kadoma.

He is just one of around 170 people who have been turning up each day over the past week at a cholera treatment centre in desperate need of life-saving medical care. His mother Hilda brought him here four days ago. "He was weak and very sick," she says.

Courage and the 16 other children that share cots in the tent are the lucky ones. They are likely to survive. Courage probably caught cholera because the sanitation system near his house was broken. "There is sewage and uncollected rubbish all around my house," says Hilda. "Most of my neighbours have also caught the disease."

Cholera is a water-borne disease that spreads rapidly in poor sanitary conditions, especially where there is sewage.

Like many other towns across Zimbabwe, Kadoma's water and sanitation infrastructure is in poor repair and a prime source of the recent spike in cholera cases there. The country's political and economic crisis means little has been or can be done to rebuild this infrastructure.

A lack of medical supplies, a shortage of health workers and the absence of health education materials about cholera have amplified the epidemic. The first cases were diagnosed in August 2008. By the end of the year, the outbreak was still not under control, having spread to all provinces throughout

the country with nearly 33,000 reported cases and 1,622 deaths.

The cholera treatment centre (CTC) at Kadoma was set up initially by the Health Ministry and a local non-governmental organisation. It is now one of a hundred CTCs across Zimbabwe funded by the European Commission.

The CTCs are on the front line in the battle against cholera, and if patients get there early enough, the cholera is easily treated. So far, the lives of many thousands of people have been saved. However, to avoid future outbreaks, the causes of the epidemic have to be addressed.

The European Commission has been the largest international donor to health-related activities in Zimbabwe. While it has focused on saving lives, it has also funded initiatives that deal with the underlying causes. These include providing incentives to retain health workers, procuring essential drugs and hospital supplies and supporting the repair of water and sanitation infrastructure. It has also played an important role in coordinating the international response to the epidemic.

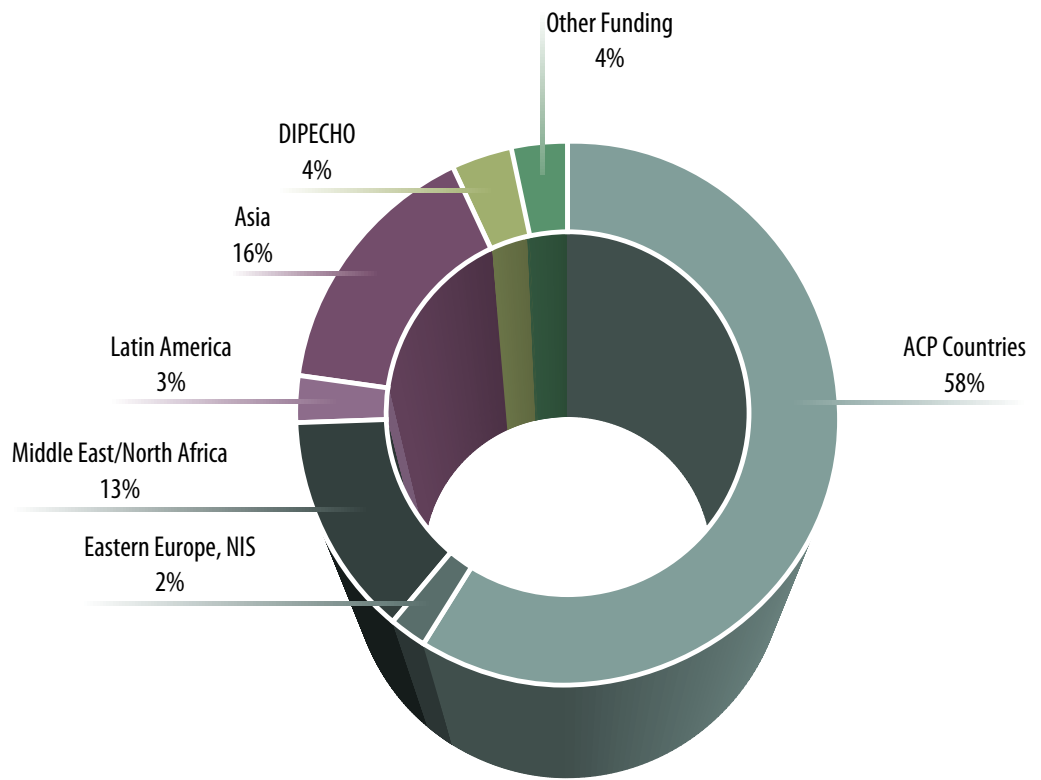
After a week, Courage was well enough to return home. His mother received information about how following basic hygiene rules, like washing hands, using clean toilets and not shaking hands, will help to prevent her son from catching cholera again.

"This was a bad experience for Courage and me", she says. "I will do my best to make sure it never happens again."

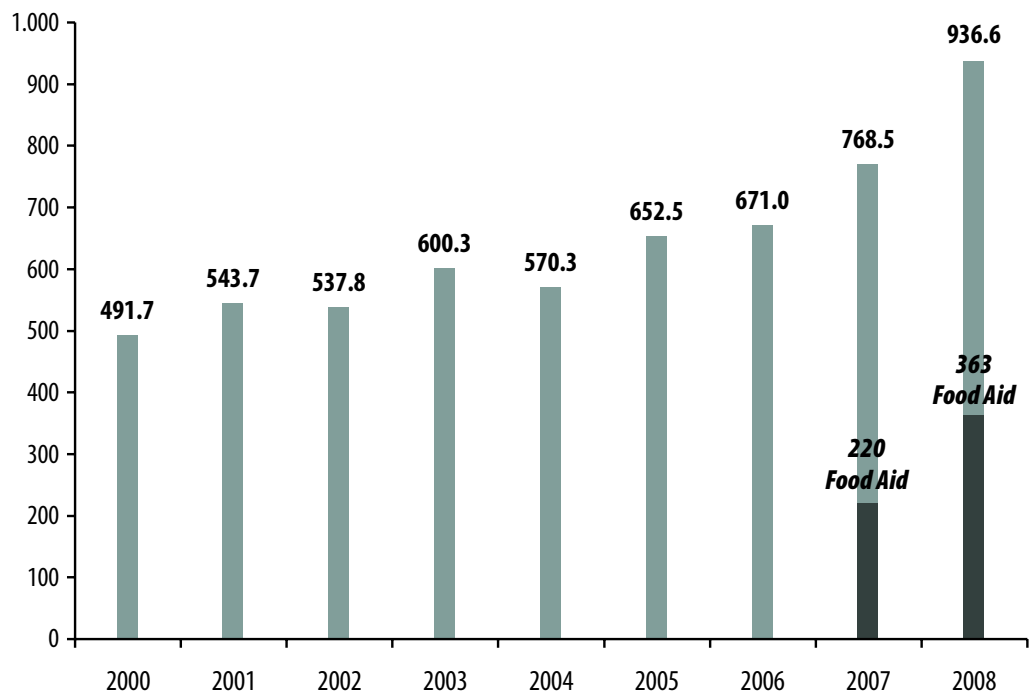
FINANCIAL DECISIONS FOR HUMANITARIAN AID BY REGION IN 2008

Country/sub-region	Decisions in €m	Country/sub-region	Decisions in €m
AFRICA, CARIBBEAN, PACIFIC	546.847	ASIA	148.257
Burundi	16.637	Afghanistan/Iran/Pakistan	36.300
Cameroun	2.000	Bangladesh	20.501
Caribbean	5.250	China	2.000
Central African Republic	7.800	India	5.990
Chad	30.000	Indonesia	2.000
Congo (Democratic Republic)	53.550	Myanmar (Burma)/Thailand	39.000
Eritrea	4.000	Nepal	12.466
Ethiopia	23.500	Philippines	6.500
Guinea	1.300	Sri Lanka	19.000
Guinea Bissau	0.500	Timor-Leste	2.000
Haiti	16.000	Vietnam/Laos	2.500
Horn of Africa	40.600		
Kenya	15.500	LATIN AMERICA	24.070
Liberia	16.600	Bolivia	3.000
Madagascar	1.500	Colombia	12.500
Mauritania	2.000	Ecuador	2.000
Namibia	0.350	Honduras/Guatemala	2.170
Regional Drought Preparedness	30.000	Paraguay	1.400
Sahel	15.700	Peru	1.000
Somalia	34.797	Regional Latin America	2.000
South East Africa	3.500		
Sudan	167.000	DIPECHO	32.325
Suriname	0.400	Central America	10.000
Tanzania	10.863	Central Asia	7.325
Uganda	19.500	South East Africa	5.000
West Africa	3.000	South East Asia	10.000
Zimbabwe	25.000		
		OTHER FUNDING	39.833
EASTERN EUROPE, NIS	20.450	Capacity building	2.534
Georgia	8.000	Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF)	2.000
Moldova	0.700	Grants, Services and other	2.487
Northern Caucasus (Chechnya crisis)	11.000	Technical assistance	25.000
Tajikistan	0.750	Support expenditure including evaluation, communication and audits	7.812
		Total	936.642
MIDDLE EAST/NORTH AFRICA	124.860		
Algeria (Sahrawi refugees)	10.000		
Iraq (incl. Syria)	30.000		
Middle East (Palestinians and Lebanon)	82.760		
Yemen	2.100		

ECHO: FINANCING DECISIONS 2008



ECHO: FINANCING DECISIONS 2000-2008



TO CONTACT US

For additional information on the Commission's Humanitarian Aid department, please visit our website at:

<http://ec.europa.eu/echo/>

To know who is who in the department and to contact us, please visit our website at:

http://ec.europa.eu/echo/about/what/who_en.htm

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humanitarian aid



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THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S HUMANITARIAN AID

The European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) is a service under the direct responsibility of Commissioner Louis Michel.

Since 1992, the Commission has funded relief to millions of victims of natural and man-made disasters outside the European Union (EU).

Aid is channelled impartially to the affected populations, regardless of their race, ethnic group, religion, gender, age, nationality or political affiliation.

Part of the department's mission is to raise public awareness of the issues at stake.

Working with partners in the field

For humanitarian aid, the Commission works with about 200 operational partners, including specialised United Nations agencies, the Red Cross/Crescent movement and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

A key donor

The European Commission is one of the biggest sources of humanitarian aid in the world. In 2008, it provided €937 million for humanitarian programmes. This does not include the aid given separately by the EU's 27 Member States. Commission support went to projects in more than 70 countries. The funds are spent on goods and services such as food, clothing, shelter, medical provisions, water supplies, sanitation, emergency repairs and mine-clearing. The Commission also funds disaster preparedness and mitigation projects in regions prone to natural catastrophes.

A strong presence on the ground

To boost its presence in the field, ECHO has established regional offices in six capitals around the world: Dakar (Senegal), Nairobi (Kenya), Amman (Jordan), New Delhi (India), Bangkok (Thailand) and Managua (Nicaragua). It also has around 30 field offices located in crisis zones.

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