Humanitarian aid

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PURPOSE : to present the Humanitarian Aid Office : ECHO - Annual Report 2002. CONTENT : in 2002 natural disasters affected 170 million people and killed almost 40,000. More than 42 ongoing wars and violent crises throughout the year left behind a humanitarian legacy of 37 million uprooted people. Despite the fact that ECHO, with a budget of EUR 537.8 million in 2002, once again was amongst the three main humanitarian donors world-wide, global humanitarian aid of USD 4.5 billion (OCHA) remains only a fraction of global military spending of USD 839 billion (SIPRI Yearbook 2002), obliging the humanitarian community to limit its response and to focus on the areas of highest needs. ECHO's response followed the global evolution of the essential needs of people affected by natural and man-made disasters, with a continued shift from Eastern Europe to Africa and Asia. Half of the violent crises were located in Africa, hosting 27.5% of all refugees. Asia hosted the largest refugee population world-wide (48.3% of all refugees). ECHO succeeded in implementing its needs-based strategy, as reflected by the regional distribution of its funding of humanitarian operations: populations of ACP countries were the biggest recipient of aid (EUR 211.5 million or 39%), followed by Asia (EUR 137.96 million or 26%) and by Eastern Europe (EUR 85.3 million or 16 %). New emergencies, like the one in Afghanistan caused by the accelerated return of somewhere between 1.5 and 2 million refugees and the food crisis in Southern Africa with up to 13 million people facing serious food shortages required ECHO to call on the emergency aid reserve for an additional EUR 80 million in commitment appropriations. Also, in the context of 'post 11 September' international politics, ECHO started in a timely manner to make contingency plans to deal with the humanitarian consequences of a war in Iraq. This involved close co-ordination with Member States, major partners, especially those in the UN and Red Cross movement, and with other major donors such as the United States. Whereas the plight of the Iraqi people, caused by two major conflicts followed by ten years of international sanctions, received increasing media attention in 2002, other humanitarian crises have disappeared from the headlines. ECHO successfully continued its support in favour of forgotten crises. The total funding allocated to forgotten crises identified in Tanzania, Uganda, Yemen, Angola, Chechnya and Western Sahara reached EUR 85 million (16% of ECHO's budget). Another feature of ECHO's work was to achieve sustainability of its operations, by trying to hand-over projects or lay the ground for future linkage to longer-term development instruments. Such implementation of a policy linking relief, rehabilitation and development ('LRRD') was marked for the phasing-down of its operations in the Balkans. Also, in Sierra Leone and in Angola ECHO's provision of humanitarian aid became part of an integrated EC Action plan to tackle the humanitarian crises and the initial resettlement process. New developments in relation to crisis management matters under the Common Foreign and Security Policy as well as in the context of the "Convention for the Future of Europe" have necessitated an active response from ECHO explaining and defending the specificity of the "humanitarian space." ECHO deepened its relationships with its major partners through the so-called "Strategic Programming Dialogues". They were held in November 2002 for the third year running with the main UN agencies (UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, OCHA and, for the first time, WHO). Similar dialogues were held with the ICRC, IFRC and the NGOs. In 2002 ECHO undertook significant efforts to further improve communication, collaboration and co-ordination with the European Parliament. The EP adopted in its plenary session on 14 January 2003 the report prepared by Mrs Carlotti, expressing the EP's favourable appreciation of ECHO's progress in effective aid delivery, simplification of procedures and sound financial management during the period 2001-2002. ECHO enhanced its information, communication and awareness raising activities during 2002, notably through increased coverage in the mass media and through the launch of its redesigned website in November.. As concerns the continuous implementation of reform in 2002, ECHO moved away from centralised to partially decentralised financial circuits. The internal control systems has been reoriented and further strengthened allowing a better assessment of risks related to humanitarian projects and a more efficient monitoring of progress by concentrating on outputs. In July 2002 ECHO underwent an internal re-organisation to further improve the efficiency of the service, to create new synergies and a better distribution of the workload between units.