Resolution on the recent tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean and Union's aid for victims

2005/2500(RSP) - 13/01/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

In a joint resolution with 560 votes in favour, 1 against and 19 abstentions, Parliament expressed its condolences and deepest sympathy to the peoples and governments of the afflicted countries, as well as to all the families of victims in Southeast Asia, East Africa, Europe and elsewhere. It also expressed its thanks to the people of the countries affected for the way they responded to the human disaster, despite their own personal suffering and loss, giving so much succour to European nationals affected by the disaster. Parliament was concerned over the unknown number of victims in Burma, and criticised Burma's military junta for sealing parts of the country's coastline and for its general refusal to cooperate with the international community, which will have a detrimental effect on its own victims of the tsunami.

The emergency response:

Members called on the international community to pay special attention to the situation of the 1.5 million children who have been affected by the disaster. They urged that relief be directed towards finding, identifying and reuniting children who have lost their families, ensuring that children are returned to school as soon as possible and, in the light of reports which suggest that child traffickers are emerging to take advantage of the disaster by selling the youngsters into forced labour or sexual slavery, directing the relief effort towards ensuring that children are protected from exploitation.

In addition, Member States are asked to facilitate admission into the EU of those orphans in the tsunami-stricken regions whose relatives are living in Member States.

Parliament emphasised that it is essential that the UN be allowed to fulfil its key role as coordinator of international aid efforts in the field and it stressed that there must be no gap between the initial emergency aid phase and the rehabilitation and reconstruction phase that will follow.

Financial response:

Parliament welcomed the EU's rapid disbursement of the initial EUR 23 million, as well as the involvement of ECHO experts in the relief effort. It also welcomed the mobilisation of EUR 100 million from the emergency aid reserve, and noted, moreover, the Commission's intention of providing for additional financial assistance of up to EUR 350 million for rehabilitation and reconstruction aid. It approved the statement in the Council Conclusions of 7 January 2005 to the effect that it is important to ensure that the resources released in connection with the recent events are additional to the commitments already made in the field of development.

Parliament took the view that any substantial contribution by the EU to the reconstruction and development of tsunami-affected countries should not be offered to the detriment of assistance to other countries or regions. EU assistance will be financed taking into consideration the budgetary procedures and, if necessary, on the basis of all possibilities provided for in the Interinstitutional Agreement of 6 May 1999 between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on budgetary discipline and improvement of the budgetary procedure.

Members supported calls for consideration of debt suspension, debt cancellation, debt relief and debt swaps for the countries worst affected by the tsunami, strictly ring-fenced to reduce poverty and to rebuild affected communities. The Council is asked to support the setting-up of a Task Force, including the World

Bank, the IMF, the Asian Development Bank and the Paris Club of creditors, in order to develop a debt relief plan by February.

Medium-term action:

There must be technology for a comprehensive and effective early warning system developed without delay and made available to the countries of the Indian Ocean, as well as those of other regions vulnerable to tsunami and other natural disasters. Parliament called also on the on the Council and Commission to see if the Galileo system can assist in the immediate setting-up of an early-warning system for the tsunami-stricken Southeast Asian and East African countries in the Indian Ocean, and also to promote the implementation of an appropriate system of alert for ACP and Mediterranean countries as well as for the EU coastline.

Long-term needs:

Parliament stressed that rebuilding the affected areas must focus on improving the situation of the surviving inhabitants by aiming to reduce poverty as well as future vulnerability to tsunami. All funds given for reconstruction must be subject to full transparency and accountability before their disbursement. Parliament calls on the governments concerned to develop National Reconstruction Plans which include mechanisms for a broad spectrum of civil society to participate in their design and implementation.

Sri Lanka and Indonesia:

Members called on the European Union and the international community to promote the peace processes in Indonesia and Sri Lanka alongside long-term reconstruction and rehabilitation aid to those countries. Parliament wwelcomed the fact that for the first time in 18 months the Indonesian Government has rapidly opened up the Aceh province to international relief agencies and journalists, and that the rebel movement has declared a unilateral cease-fire. It was deeply concerned, however, by reports of renewed military raids against rebels in the Aceh province. All parties must refrain from any action that obstructs or delays access and assistance to the communities and citizens in need.