Resolution on famine in Niger

2005/2600(RSP) - 08/09/2005 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

The European Parliament adopted a resolution on famine in Niger.

The resolution had been tabled by the PES, Greens/ALE, EPP-ED, ALDE, UEN and GUE/NGL groups.

Niger was the world's second poorest country even before poor rains and locust invasions devastated last year's crops, leading to an estimated third of its close to 12 million people suffering from severe food shortages, among them 800 000 children, who are facing acute malnutrition. Parliament urges the international community not to turn its back on the continued suffering in Niger as food distribution continues across the worst-affected parts of the country but financial support for emergency operations shows worrying signs of tailing off. It welcomes the Commission's earmarking of EUR 4.6 million in humanitarian aid to Niger, as well as the pledge to 'provide additional humanitarian funds should the situation continue to deteriorate', as announced on 1 July 2005. However, Members deplore the insufficient and slow reaction of the government of Niger to the looming crisis, and regret the failure of the authorities to distribute free food in the early stages of the crisis.

Parliament regrets the absence of sufficient government intervention to prevent speculation and crisis, and calls on the government of Niger to create mechanisms to ensure that such practices do not recur. It questions the wisdom of the total deregulation of agricultural markets undertaken under the 'structural adjustment' policies advocated by the IMF, but warns, at the same time, against the risk of misguided food aid, and calls on the international community to end food aid as soon as it considers that the situation has improved. It deplores the late response by international donors to the UN funding appeals first made nine months ago, and stresses the difficulty in mobilising international aid just as the rich G8 countries were claiming to make Africa their top priority. Parliament deeply regrets the fact that African catastrophes are met with such laboured mobilisation, whereas the tsunami and its victims, among whom were Western tourists, attracted huge media attention. It stresses that the core problem in Niger is chronic and widespread poverty, and that the country has no margin to build contingency stocks to meet the kinds of need created by the crisis.

It welcomes the coordination of ECHO emergency aid with the longer-term food security operations administered by the Commission, as well as the clear indication of rural development and food security as a priority in the Niger Country Strategy Paper.

The resolution calls on the Commission and Council

- to improve the early warning system in order to monitor sensitive regions where famine may arise, so as to allow earlier action and prevent disasters;
- to acknowledge the effects of global warming on sub-Saharan Africa and act in Europe to mitigate those effects by adopting stringent CO2 reduction strategies at Union level;
- to implement, once the emergency is over, a comprehensive policy for tackling the root causes of the crisis, in order to address the underlying structural causes and improve agricultural productivity in the region.