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European Parliament resolution on the recent tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean

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EU aid for tidal wave victims in the Indian Ocean

European Parliament resolution on the recent tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Jakarta Tsunami Aid Conference of 6 January 2005, and to the International Donors' Conference held in Geneva on 11 January 2005,

- having regard to the conclusions of the extraordinary meeting of 7 January 2005 of the General Affairs and External Relations Council,

- having regard to the Commission Communication "Europe and Asia: a strategic framework for enhanced partnership" (COM(2001)0469) and the consistent emphasis it attaches throughout to the importance of the EU's relations with Asia, a continent representing more than half the world's population,

- having regard to Rule 103(4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas a strong earthquake measuring 9 on the Richter scale hit Southeast Asia on 26 December 2004 and triggered massive tsunami in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Malaysia, the Maldives, Bangladesh, Burma/Myanmar, Mauritius, Somalia, Kenya, Seychelles, Réunion and Tanzania,

B. whereas this disaster has killed more than 160000 people, including EU citizens, in the many countries hit by the tsunami, injured many more and left up to five million people displaced and lacking access to essential supplies such as food, clean water and medicines,

C. whereas in the affected countries the disaster has hit the poorest communities, such as fishing communities, the hardest, and thousands of children have been orphaned by the disaster,

D. whereas much of the communication, energy and educational infrastructure has been destroyed in the affected coastal regions,

E. whereas polluted waters and heavy rains after the tsunami have increased the risk of diseases such as cholera, malaria and typhoid,

F. whereas experts warn that damage to marine life, including mangroves and coral reefs, could be vast and lasting, which would have serious consequences for local communities dependent on fishing for their food supply and their livelihoods,

G. whereas the global response to the disaster has been overwhelming; whereas the EU and its Member States have pledged almost EUR 1,5 billion so far, and the amount continues to rise; and whereas the Commission has already committed EUR 23 million and promised funds of EUR 350 million; whereas, however, EUR 150 million of this is not new money, but would be taken from existing long-term development projects; whereas the European Development Fund must not be reprogrammed in order to deal with tsunami relief in African countries, and new money must also be found for the relief effort there,

H. whereas in previous disasters, the amount of aid pledged has often not been reflected in the actual amount of real aid delivered,

I. whereas the UN is carrying out needs assessments across the affected areas, but many areas affected by the tsunami remain difficult to access, particularly in Sumatra,

J. whereas most of the countries affected by the tsunami were already burdened with large debt repayments, and whereas money given to the relief effort would be rendered ineffective if the donor countries continued to receive interest payments on these debts,

#### Immediate reaction

1. Expresses 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;

2. Expresses 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;

3. Welcomes the generosity of all donors, both public and private, in responding to this crisis, reflecting a globalisation of solidarity, displayed particularly by members of the public;

4. Expresses concern over the unknown number of victims in Burma; criticises 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;

5. Calls on its Members to voluntarily donate the equivalent of one or more daily allowances to the victims of the tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean;

#### The emergency response

6. Stresses that the children orphaned by the disaster must be one of the key priorities for relief agencies, as they are at increasing risk of abduction as well as of physical and sexual abuse;

7. Strongly believes that, to protect the orphans affected by the tsunami effectively, it is necessary to offer protection from any kind of exploitation and from clandestine international adoptions, as well as to safeguard their future prospects by providing a safe and healthy social environment; calls for

the provision of psychosocial assistance — with a particular focus on helping children — to avoid post-traumatic stress;

8. Calls on the international community to pay special attention to the situation of the 1,5 million children who, according to Unicef's estimates, have been affected by the disaster; urges 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;

9. Calls on Member States to facilitate admission into the EU of those orphans in the tsunami-stricken regions whose relatives are living in Member States;

10. Calls on the governments of the countries affected by the disaster to facilitate the work of humanitarian organisations in distributing aid by making every possible effort to secure access to aid for all those in need, whatever their political beliefs, ethnicity or religion, and by minimising bureaucracy for aid agencies;

11. Insists that all coordination of the global relief operation must be led by the UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), with full involvement and visibility of ECHO, and supported by all donors, and welcomes the EU's full support for the UN and its commitment to funding OCHA in the region;

12. Calls on the UN Secretary-General to appoint UN humanitarian coordinators for each of the countries affected by the tsunami, with clear responsibilities to direct all other UN agencies responding to the crisis;

13. Calls on Member States and the Commission, in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 3519 and its own resolution of 30 November 2000 [1], to ensure the full inclusion of women, both within the present tsunami-affected regions and at international level, in the coordination of the global relief operation;

14. Emphasises that it is essential that the UN be allowed to fulfil its key role as coordinator of international aid efforts in the field and stresses that there must be no gap between the initial emergency aid phase and the rehabilitation and reconstruction phase that will follow; calls on the

Member States, in conjunction with local governments and other players, to ensure that EU action is closely coordinated internally for the emergency relief as well as for the mid- and long-term action necessary for rebuilding the affected areas;

#### Financial response

15. Welcomes the EU's rapid disbursement of the initial EUR 23 million, as well as the involvement of ECHO experts in the relief effort; further welcomes the mobilisation of the European Community Civil Protection Mechanism, which has been active since the tsunami occurred, as well as the supporting work of the Commission's Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC), which has coordinated this assistance;

16. Welcomes the mobilisation of EUR 100 million from the emergency aid reserve; notes, moreover, the Commission's intention of providing for additional financial assistance of up to EUR 350 million for rehabilitation and reconstruction aid to help in the relief efforts following the Asian tsunami disaster; asks the Commission, however, to explore all possibilities within the scope of the 2005 budget and to provide for the necessary proposals once the assessments have been concluded; welcomes 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; insists that the reconstruction process should be transparent in all respects, particularly the political, economic and financial ones;

17. Takes 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 [2];

18. Calls on the European Union, its Member States and the international community to deliver on pledges as a matter of urgency and within an agreed time span, given the experience from past catastrophes where many early generous pledges were made but only a fraction actually delivered upon;

19. Welcomes the proposal for a EUR 1 billion "Indian Ocean tsunami lending facility" to be managed by the European Investment Bank, but demands that any funding respect sustainable social and environmental standards;

20. Supports 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; calls on the Council 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;

21. Welcomes the Commission Communication on a new partnership with South East Asia (COM(2003)0399), endorsed by the Council and Parliament; calls for a Commission proposal along the lines of the communication and taking into account the effects of the tsunami disaster;

#### Medium-term action

22. Calls for the technology for a comprehensive and effective early warning system to be 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;

23. Calls also 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, but also to promote the implementation of an appropriate system of alert for ACP and Mediterranean countries as well as for the EU coastline; notes that ACP countries have long been calling for a disaster facility, and urges the Commission to provide new and fresh money in order to set up such a facility and provide a comprehensive early-warning mechanism for these regions;

24. Is aware that the long-term consequences of the devastation of the marine environment and resources will have a dramatic impact on local fishing communities; calls on the Council and the Commission to examine ways in which tangible aid, in the form of vessels, gear, technical expertise and raw materials, can be directed towards the affected communities;

25. Underlines the importance of the request by the affected governments to simplify the application procedures for aid, notably EU aid, in order to make it directly accessible to the local people in need, and calls on the Commission to report back to Parliament on its efforts to meet this request;

## Long-term needs

26. Stresses 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; insists that all funds given for reconstruction must be subject to full transparency and accountability before their disbursement; 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;

27. Hopes that, in the rehabilitation phase, past reconstruction mistakes can be avoided through better coastal zone management policies which leave the coastal environment in a more natural state and make those areas less vulnerable to future disasters;

28. Calls for the international community, led by the UN, to develop an effective and coordinated plan for action in the event of future disasters, so that such responses are not ad hoc and a coordinated response can be better achieved in the future;

29. Welcomes the rapid response to the disaster by Member States, some even mobilising military logistics; strongly encourages the EU to make available a joint military facility for airlift and infrastructure repair and communications, where such facilities are still needed to assist the most difficult-to-access communities in the tsunami-hit countries; calls, therefore, on the Council to develop EU military capabilities which also have the aim of providing an appropriate and effective response to other future humanitarian and natural disasters;

30. Insists that the Council support the creation of a pool of specialised civilian civil protection units, with appropriate equipment, which should undertake joint training and be available in the event of natural, humanitarian or environmental disasters, or those associated with industrial risks, within the Union or in the rest of the world;

31. Stresses that 1,2 billion people worldwide live in poverty, with almost 1 billion people malnourished, including over 150 million children under five; underlines, therefore, the need for Member States and all donor nations in the global community to fulfil the agreed target of giving 0,7% of GDP in overseas development assistance, as agreed in Monterrey;

Sri Lanka and Indonesia

32. Calls on the European Union and the international community to promote the peace processes in Indonesia and Sri Lanka alongside the provision of long-term reconstruction and rehabilitation aid to those countries;

33. Calls on the parties to the conflict in Sri Lanka to recommence the peace process at the earliest possible time, and urges them to take into account the manifest good will and support shown by all the communities in Sri Lanka towards each other, and the support of the international community for the rehabilitation and recovery of Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the tsunami disaster, which affected all the citizens of the country; calls on both parties to consider the creation of a joint task force in order to guarantee a just distribution of aid in the country;

34. Insists that the EU, with the support of Norway, must build upon the good will shown, and proceed to augment the peace process as defined in the Oslo talks of December 2002 with commensurate development and rehabilitation assistance;

35. Welcomes 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; is deeply concerned, however, by reports of renewed military raids against rebels in the Aceh province; calls on all the parties to refrain from any action that obstructs or delays access and assistance to the communities and citizens in need;

36. Calls on the EU's banks and financial institutions to create a code of conduct for banking commissions with respect to private individuals' donations to NGOs and aid organisations, especially in the period immediately following a natural or humanitarian disaster;

Final point

37. Calls on the Council to report to Parliament in six months' time on the success of EU relief efforts in the region;

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38. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments of the Member States, the heads of state and parliaments of Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, India, the Maldives, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Tanzania, Burma/Myanmar, Mauritius, Kenya, Somalia and the Seychelles, the UN Secretary-General and the Head of OCHA.

[1] OJ C 228, 13.8.2001, p. 22.

[2] OJ C 172, 18.6.1999, p. 1.

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