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WRITTEN QUESTION P-2420/02 by Marco Cappato (NI) to the Commission. Further humanitarian aid for North Korea.

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WRITTEN QUESTION P-2420/02

by Marco Cappato (NI) to the Commission

(8 August 2002)

Subject: Further humanitarian aid for North Korea

The Commission has recently decided to extend humanitarian aid for North Korea by earmarking a further EUR 4 175 million from the ECHO budget in order to fund basic health care structures in that country. Meanwhile, the international press is increasingly reporting the alarming news that the North Korean regime has been misappropriating humanitarian aid and using it to strengthen its military and police forces.

What measures has the Commission taken to verify that humanitarian aid is not being used for the upkeep of the repressive machinery of the Pyongyang regime?

What agreements does the Commission have with the North Korean regime to ensure that these funds are used exclusively to improve the living standards of North Korean civilians?

Does the Commission not think it is extremely urgent and necessary to set up a committee of inquiry into the allocation of aid to North Korea, with a view to assessing its effectiveness and validity, and maybe even suspending it?

Answer given by Mr Nielson on behalf of the Commission

(1 October 2002)

In the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) the Commission only funds projects carried out by European non-governmental organisations (NGOs), United Nations (UN) agencies or international organisations as in all countries in which the Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) operates in accordance with Council Regulation (EC) No 1257/96 of 20 June 1996, concerning humanitarian aid(1).

The allocation of funds referred to by the Honourable Member will be entirely channelled through independent organisations: Danish Red Cross, the World Health Organisation, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (Unicef) and Handicap International.

It will serve to support the following actions:

- distribution of modern drug kits to over 1 700 health institutions in four different provinces;
- provision of orthopaedic devices and adequate physiotherapeutic treatment to 3 200 people with mobility impairment;
- increase the availability of safe blood with reduced risk of transmitting viral infections through blood transfusion in national provincial blood centres in DPRK;
- life-saving nutritional rehabilitation for 10 000 severely malnourished children in baby homes and paediatric and county hospitals.

The Commission has sought consistently to strengthen agreements with the DPRK authorities in respect of its assistance, including the distribution of humanitarian aid. For instance this year an informal Letter of Understanding was signed between the FDRC(2) and the ECHO office in Pyongyang laying down the specific requirements which the Commission expects to be met during the implementation of ECHO funded operations.

Moreover, at the regular Union Troika meetings with the DPRK, the Commission has consistently raised the issue of working and access conditions for European NGOs and indeed there have been continuing signs of improvement in that field.

ECHO has developed a comprehensive system of assessment and monitoring of all its projects and this is implemented in DPRK.

Given the particular circumstances in this country, additional specific requirements are also applied and funding is only granted:

- to organisations that have an established and permanent presence in DPRK, so that continuous monitoring can be carried out; and

- in areas where the DPRK authorities have granted open access to ECHO's implementing partners, following the principle of no access, no aid (today 173 out of the 211 counties are officially open to international agencies in DPRK).

Furthermore, in relation to ECHO's interventions in the health sector, the drugs distribution programme funded in 2000/2001 has just been the object of an audit by the European Court of Auditors. The checks carried out in April 2002 in the distribution process did not find any anomaly of the

sort mentioned by the Honourable Member, and the visit to clinics randomly selected for the audit revealed that the medicines contained in the Community funded kits were properly being used by doctors and their patients.

In view of the above, the Commission does not consider that a Committee of Enquiry, as suggested by the Honourable Member, would be appropriate.

(1) OJ L 163, 2.7.1996.

(2) FDRC: Flood Damage Rehabilitation Committee (the organisation designated by the DPRK government to deal with European NGOs).