



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**Brussels, 7 January 2005 (10.01)
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NOTE

from: Presidency
dated: 7 January 2005
to: Delegations

Subject: Earthquake and tsunami in the Indian Ocean

Delegations will find attached the conclusions of the extraordinary meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council on 7 January 2005.

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

An unprecedented disaster

1. The Council expresses its sympathy and solidarity for the populations affected by the earthquake and the tsunami in Asia and the Indian Ocean. This disaster, which is extremely serious owing to its geographical scope and the extent of human and material loss, has affected a total of 12 countries and resulted in over 150 000 deaths, thousands of missing and injured, and several million displaced or homeless people.
2. It restates the EU's solidarity in support of the States and peoples concerned, and mourns the high number of victims of the disaster. In this respect, the members of the Council wish to express their gratitude to the local authorities and populations for their support for those European citizens affected.
3. It welcomes the immense generosity and solidarity shown by European citizens and civil society following the disaster, and voices the determination of the Union and its Member States to meet the challenge and to deploy all available means to that end. Aid should go to the most affected regions and the people in greatest need, especially children. Since they are particularly vulnerable, they need special help, through the appropriate United Nations bodies such as UNICEF, among others.
4. The Council emphasises the responsibility of the national and regional authorities of the countries concerned with regard to the identification of needs as well as the management and distribution of aid, and calls for aid to be sent swiftly to all populations concerned irrespective of the internal conflicts affecting some of the stricken countries.

5. It points to the United Nations' central role in the coordination and management of assistance to victims, and also stresses the particular importance of cooperation with the OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs).
6. The Council expresses its gratitude to ASEAN for its rapid action in calling a special extended summit in Jakarta, which the European Union was able to take part in at the highest level. It welcomes the meeting's final declaration.

Ongoing action

7. The Council points to the effort already deployed by the European Union and its Member States in the humanitarian, financial and logistical field, as well as the various mechanisms put in place to coordinate the Union's work, in particular the coordination of humanitarian aid, the European Community's civil protection mechanism and consular cooperation. It commends ECHO's capacity to react to the situation swiftly to mobilise humanitarian aid.
8. It emphasises too the challenges of coordination on the ground, and the importance of surmounting administrative obstacles, particularly those faced by NGOs.
9. The Council has heard the reports given by the Presidency and Commission, which visited certain countries in the region as early as 1 January. United Nations representatives attending the Council provided an overview of the needs of the affected countries and the efforts to be undertaken on the basis of the appeal launched by the United Nations Secretary-General.
10. It points to the role played, particularly in terms of logistics, by the military capabilities of some Member States. In this connection, the SG/HR will examine the possibilities for better coordination of military resources through the appropriate bodies, so that they can be made available efficiently in support of the United Nations' OCHA.

Initiatives in the field of humanitarian assistance and aid for rehabilitation and reconstruction

11. The Council stresses the vital importance of an efficient transition from the humanitarian phase, through the intermediate rehabilitation phase, to the longer-term reconstruction phase.
12. The Council stresses the need for appropriate coordination between all the players concerned for the assessment of medium-term needs in order to optimise the effectiveness and quality of aid. It emphasises that reconstruction efforts must be based on the national priorities of the countries concerned and must respect the principle of ownership.
13. The Council emphasises that, in the field of health, it is essential to anticipate the known risk of epidemic in order to prevent further loss of life, by supplying basic foodstuffs, drinking water, medicines and vaccines. The Council calls for a rapid and coordinated reconstruction of public health structures and capabilities. Care provision at all levels is an essential condition for the success of reconstruction efforts in the other sectors. With that in mind, the Union and its Member States will act in support of the WHO.
14. The Council welcomes the Commission's initiatives to contribute to the effort to restore the affected coastal regions, which will make it possible to assist fishing communities.

15. The Council recalls that the humanitarian-aid response of the European Union and its Member States and the initial forecasts for rehabilitation and reconstruction currently stand at over EUR 1,5 billion in official aid. That is the basis upon which the European Union and the Member States will adopt a position at the donor conference in Geneva on 11 January. In this context, solidarity in facing this disaster must not lead us to forget the general issue of development, humanitarian aid and the Millennium Goals, especially in Africa, nor to reduce the resources needed for that purpose. In this connection, it is important to ensure that resources released in the context of recent events are indeed additional to development commitments already made. The Council will come back to the implementation of commitments regularly.
16. The Council welcomes the Commission's decision to propose, in addition to the EUR 23 million already paid out, taking EUR 100 million from the Community budget's emergency reserve in the short term, thereby rapidly releasing additional financial resources for the phase of following up and boosting humanitarian aid. The budgetary authority is urged to formalise this agreement early next week. It also welcomes the Commission's intention to propose the release, via the appropriate budgetary instruments, of financial resources of EUR 350 million for the rehabilitation and reconstruction phase in the medium and long term, in preparation for the donor conference in Geneva on 11 January 2005. The Council supports the Commission's intention to make use of all available internal procedures to implement reconstruction aid programmes as swiftly as possible.
17. The Commission and the European Investment Bank are encouraged to continue preparatory work on the setting up of a concessional finance facility, the "Indian Ocean Tsunami Facility", of up to EUR 1 billion.

Longer-term action: risk prevention, effectiveness of humanitarian intervention and support measures

18. The international response should make populations and governments less vulnerable and better equipped to cope with possible natural disasters in the future.
19. The Council urges the Commission to submit proposals for a strategy to strengthen measures on prevention, early warning and readiness for disasters, the need for which has been shown by recent events. The Council will adopt a position along those lines for the forthcoming Kobe Conference (World Conference on Disaster Reduction), and supports Germany's initiative on organising, during 2005, an international conference under the auspices of the United Nations.
20. The Council will also examine all possible ways of improving the European Community's civil-protection and humanitarian-aid mechanism, including analytical capacity, while taking account of the principles and specific nature of humanitarian aid. It emphasises the need to strengthen the role of the UN in the humanitarian response and for the European Union to contribute to it. In that spirit, it asks the Commission and the competent Council bodies to investigate the possibilities for developing a European Union rapid response capability (planning, coordination and resource mobilisation structure) to deal with disasters of the kind we have just experienced. The Council has also asked the appropriate bodies to begin to assess the setting up of a European Voluntary Humanitarian-Aid Corps.
21. The Union will swiftly assess lessons learned regarding the protection of European citizens, with a view to improving its ability to react in this area. In this context, the Union will examine additional ways of assisting citizens, in particular by coordinating the actions of Member States in fields such as relief, evacuation, shipment of foodstuff and provision of medical care.

The Council believes it is particularly important swiftly to enhance the efficiency of consular cooperation between Member States. This factor will also be examined in the framework of preparatory work on setting up the joint external service.

22. The Council is also willing to examine other support measures such as trade-support measures, and also various types of bilateral partnership. In this context, it urges the competent authorities to set up twinning relationships between regions, towns and public and private establishments such as hospitals and schools.
23. The Council notes Member States' intentions to reschedule debt-servicing for the countries affected, particularly through a moratorium on the debts of countries wishing to enter discussions to that end with the Paris Club. It will, in addition, take stock of the economic consequences of the disaster at the ECOFIN Council meeting on 18 January.
24. At its meeting on 31 January the Council will return to all the measures envisaged by the European Union and its Member States for the medium and long term with a view to formulating a European Union operational action plan.

