

STATEMENT TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

**ON STRENGTHENING EMERGENCY RELIEF, REHABILITATION,
RECONSTRUCTION AND PREVENTION IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE
INDIAN OCEAN TSUNAMI DISASTER**

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ON BEHALF OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Mr. President,

First of all, let me associate myself to previous speakers in thanking you for reconvening the plenary session of our General Assembly.

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The Acceding Countries Bulgaria and Romania, the Candidate Countries Turkey and Croatia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, align themselves with this declaration.

Mr. President,

Let me first of all express the European Union's deepest condolences to the governments and peoples of those countries that were affected, directly or indirectly, by the consequences of the earthquake and the tsunamis that hit the region of the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia, as well as parts of Eastern Africa, on 26 December last year.

Citizens from 50 countries died in the tsunami disaster. The countries of the European Union were not spared. Thousands of our citizens died or are missing in the catastrophe alongside tens of thousands from the countries in the region. We want to express also our thanks and gratitude to the authorities and people of the affected countries who have provided assistance for repatriation, and help to the citizens of our countries who were in the stricken areas. Millions of citizens from all over Europe expressed their sympathy and solidarity on Wednesday, 5th of January, by observing a three-minute silence period in memory of the numerous victims.

I would also like to extend our thanks and appreciation for the work of the United Nations family, in particular M. Jan Egeland, Under-Secretary-General and the efforts of

* Croatia continues to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process

OCHA, in reacting so promptly to this unprecedented disaster, and meeting the emergency needs of the countries and peoples concerned.

Mr. President,

In the wake of the devastation the reaction of the international community, be it from governments and civil society, including non-governmental organizations and private persons has been swift and generous.

Already on 6 January the United Nations launched the “Indian Ocean Earthquake-Tsunami Flash Appeal” at a special summit of the ASEAN heads of state and governments in Jakarta. Five days later at the donor’s conference of 11 January held in Geneva, pledges for assistance were made by representatives of member states and, as of today, close to 75% of the appeal’s funding requirements have been met. These generous contributions and pledges will be remembered as one of the fastest responses ever to an emergency appeal. It is now our common responsibility to continue to live up to our commitments and to deliver on our pledges.

To date the total commitments by the European Union and its member states, stand over 1.5 billion euro, or approximately 2 billion dollars in public aid. This exceptional effort will cover immediate humanitarian needs arising in the disaster affected areas, as well as support longer term reconstruction and development efforts. 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 and that other emergencies are not forgotten.

The European Union will continue to support the UN in the face of this enormous challenge, both in the short and long term. In this context, I would like to reaffirm the European Union’s full and unwavering support to the essential role played by the United Nations in coordinating the ongoing efforts on the ground. Close and sustained cooperation between the European Union, the UN funds and programs and the coordinating services of OCHA as well as with the Special Coordinator, Ms. Margareta Wahlstrom will be maintained.

The European Union also wishes to contribute to the strengthening of the role of the UN humanitarian response. In this respect, various options can arise and deserve to be studied with attention. Within the European Union several initiatives, among which the creation of an “international humanitarian force”, were put forward by members States of the EU: these will be the subject of intense work in the weeks to come within the European Union and in the framework of the United Nations, as laid out in the draft resolution which we are about to adopt.

Mr. Chairman,

Luxembourg’s Minister for Development cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance Mr. Jean-Louis Schiltz and European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid

Mr. Louis Michel traveled to the affected region as of 1st January. Luxembourg's Prime Minister Jean-Claude Juncker, in his capacity as President of the European Council, and the President of the European Commission Mr. José Manuel Barroso joined the leaders of the ASEAN countries in the immediate aftermath of the disaster to assure them of the solidarity of the EU member states and citizens.

At the donor's conference in Geneva, the representatives of the European Union made it clear that the EU's solidarity will not falter, and will continue past the initial emergency phase.

We must indeed look ahead. Ministers of the 25 European member states who met on 7 January in Brussels reaffirmed the long term commitment of the EU, to assist the countries and affected communities in the successive phases from humanitarian assistance to reconstruction and rehabilitation. Let there be no doubt about our long term commitment to helping the affected countries overcome the challenges they face.

A comprehensive financial aid package of the European Union is being prepared in close cooperation between member states and European Commission. Indeed on 31st January, the European Union ministers will meet again to examine all medium and long-term measures envisaged by the EU and its Member states, with a view to setting up an operational EU action plan.

Let me also reiterate that the European Union places particular importance to capacity building efforts in the area of prevention, preparedness and mitigation of natural disasters. It is crucial that the available technological and financial means be made available to prevent, to the extent possible, future natural disasters of this magnitude and their devastating consequences. The EU welcomes the initiative by the government of Germany to host a third conference on early warning in the course of this year. Following up on the commitment it made in Jakarta, the European Union will actively support efforts towards the establishment of an early warning system in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian regions. The World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which starts today in Kobe, Japan, will allow for a first exchange of views on how to proceed towards that goal.

Mr. President,

We all continue to witness the tragic consequences of the unleashed force of nature. Over the past weeks the international community has reacted collectively with an admirable display of solidarity. Rest assured that the European Union and its member states stand ready to sustain their effort.

I thank you for your attention.