

Ms. Maria Lamin
European Commission DG DEV
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Brussels, 20 June 2008

Dear Ms. Lamin,

Subject: Response to the consultation for the preparation of an EU Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction in Developing Countries

Caritas Europa, representing 44 member organizations across Europe, works towards a “liberation from everything that oppresses mankind”¹, as expressed in the Catholic Social Teaching which fosters a deepened understanding of the relationship between human dignity, sustainable development and care/justice for the environment.

Caritas Europa is grateful for this opportunity to provide input to the shaping of such Strategy based on the direct expertise and experience of our member organisations and their local church partners working in projects relating to humanitarian and development cooperation in more than 160 countries and territories. We welcome the initiative of the Commission as a very important and appropriate response to considerations enshrined in the EU Consensus on Development and the newly adopted EU Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.

Caritas Europa is a member of VOICE, the European umbrella organisation for humanitarian NGOs. The VOICE working group on DRR that submitted a response to the consultation (herewith enclosed) was prepared with key contributions from 4 of our member organisations, namely Trocaire (Ireland), Cordaid (the Netherlands), CAFOD (UK), and Caritas Belgium International, who are active in the working group.

Many of our member organisations are engaged, on the ground with local communities, in participatory programmes focusing on disaster preparedness, prevention and management, risk reduction as well as community resilience. Based on their experiences and lessons learned, some member organisations have produced useful and practical manuals and guidelines².

Caritas Europa has endorsed the document prepared by the VOICE working group and wishes to underline the following key points:

- The definition of disasters needs to be broadened out. An EU DRR Strategy should not be confined to the risks relating to natural hazards, but also to elements of conflicts.

¹ Second Synod of Bishops (1971), *Justice in the World*, Chap 1 para 2.

² See “Disaster Preparedness Manual”, CORDAID. Emergencies and Rehabilitation Department (2000), “Building resilient communities: a training manual on community managed disaster risk reduction”, CORDAID.

- The remit of the Strategy should also cover the slow-onset multi-rooted disasters, such as the current food crisis.
- More research and expertise is needed around DRR in relation to conflict and long-term crisis which do not fit into any of the classical categories of being pure emergency or pure development. This requires an approach that is innovative, flexible and timely. For example, it should be possible to operate a quick shift from relief to development, or provide quick relief in structural development programmes when necessary / when a disaster suddenly occurs, or even to adopt a development approach in a context of ongoing humanitarian crisis, such as in Darfur.
- EU policy coherence is key to successful disaster risk reduction and effective poverty alleviation. The development of the EU DRR Strategy should be well-coordinated amongst the different services of the European Commission, notably services responsible for climate change, trade and agriculture.
- Caritas Europa favours a dual approach consisting of mainstreaming DRR into humanitarian and development policies and programmes, and at the same time designing specific DRR-focused strategies and activities. The right-based approach and gender mainstreaming should be consistently applied throughout the Strategy and field programmes.
- A participatory approach involving the communities likely to be affected by disasters should be systematically adopted. Often, local communities have developed indigenous systems to deal with crises and these experiences should be valued and analysed.
- A particular consideration should be given to the situation of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups, who may not have access to information.
- The EU DRR Strategy should include elements of education and awareness raising, towards EU and national policy-makers, as well towards the civil society, including NGOs and the private sector. A multi-actor approach is indeed essential as DRR is a collective responsibility. As a consequence, it is expected that the funds allocated to DRR will increase.

We hope that these comments will be well-received and that Caritas Europa will continue to be a partner in the dialogue between civil society organisations and the European Commission, regarding DRR.

Yours sincerely,

(signed)
Marius Wanders
Secretary General