

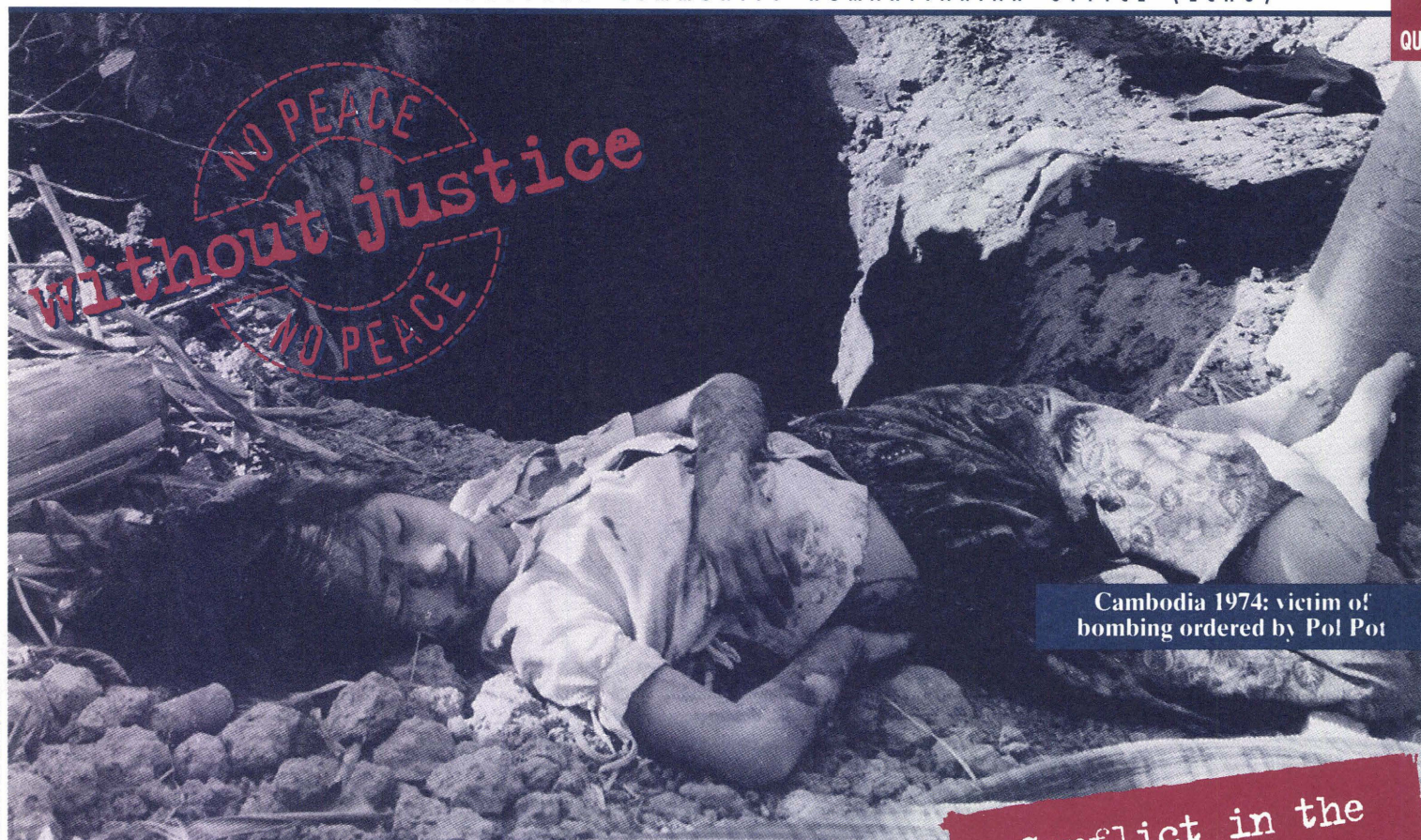
ECHOnews

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QUARTERLY



Cambodia 1974: victim of bombing ordered by Pol Pot

Conflict in the Horn of Africa

As ECHO News went to press, hundreds had died and frightened foreigners had fled after the outbreak of war between Eritrea and Ethiopia. The two countries are currently weighing the contents of a United Nations Security Council resolution calling on them to halt their border conflict immediately. If both sides fail to accept the resolution, thousands of civilians risk being caught in crossfire and both countries have the military capacity to continue a full-scale war for some time. Eritrea's president last month refused entry to an Organisation of African Unity mission sent in an attempt to establish the US- Rwanda brokered peace plan. Eritrea has refused to withdraw to territory outlined in the plan. ECHO will continue to monitor the situation closely.

"If anyone here was overcome with grief when Pol Pot died, it was for one reason only: that a man who was responsible for murdering two million Cambodians did not stand trial for one of the most monstrous crimes of the century. Even if he had been turned in, there was no court in the world that could have tried him in his lifetime. We need a credible court, one that presents a credible deterrent to the Pol Pots of the 21st century"

Emma Bonino, European Commissioner for Humanitarian affairs on the need to establish an international criminal court

Pol Pot's death on April 15 exactly two months before the Rome conference provided a timely reminder of just why the world needs a permanent International Criminal Court to investigate, judge and punish atrocious crimes that national courts are unable or unwilling to deal with.

As the world community prepared for the five-week international conference which aims to set the terms of reference for the court, Pol Pot died, untried and unpunished, with the blood of two million Cambodians on his hands. Killed in the 1970s, they were among the 170 million people reported to have died since the Second World War in genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The European Union's Humanitarian Aid Commissioner Emma Bonino, who spends her days and nights picking up the pieces after such atrocities in places from Rwanda to Yugoslavia, has been one of the most persistent advocates of a court aimed at making the next century a kinder place for humanity by ending the cycle of violence and counter-violence this impunity causes.

"It is our firm wish that the new century should start under more promising auspices with the end to the perception of impunity," she says. "Impunity is also an encouragement to commit crimes and also has been a formidable obstacles to reconciliation within societies in Bosnia, in Rwanda in Cambodia, which have literally been shattered by heinous crimes, perpetrated with deliberation and determination.

"Genocide, crimes against humanity and serious war crimes and impunity enjoyed by those responsible create a vicious spiral of violence and revenge that eventually threatens our own security. These crimes create the many Bosnias that we eventually have to deal with, often risking the lives of our own soldiers."

Dealing with the aftermath of atrocities

If Mrs. Bonino holds the establishment of an International Criminal Court so close to her heart, it is that she has seen at close range the human aftermath of the genocides, crimes against humanity and warcrimes

which are becoming part of the arsenal of modern war in which innocent civilians, including many children, women and old people are not accidental victims.

As the world's biggest donor of humanitarian aid, the 15-nation European Union and its member states have pumped 3.2 billion Ecus into the aid effort between 1991 and 1996 and is the first to rush in to help with food, medical and refugee needs after the event.

After Bosnian Serbs overran the U.N. safe haven of Srebrenica in 1995, expelling Muslims and carrying out what is believed to be a mass-killing of 8,000 of them, Mrs Bonino announced her immediate departure for Tuzla to

(→ Continued on p. 2)



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examine the humanitarian situation of Muslim refugees who had converged there.

She was appointed after the 1994 genocide in Rwanda happened, but more than three years after the event is still working to make sure that that genocide does not lead to another. After the genocide one million refugees, some of them actually responsible for the killing, streamed into what was Zaire and is now the Democratic Republic of Congo, leaving an explosive situation in overcrowded refugee camps where minority Tutsis seek revenge against the militant Hutus who killed their families.

Mrs Bonino says the situation in Rwanda underlines that humanitarian aid is not an alibi for political solutions to end conflicts once and for all. That is where the ICC comes in.

Ad hoc courts provide too little, too late, too inefficiently

There may be no justice for Pol Pot, but the European Commission has provided generous financial and logistical support to two temporary tribunals set up by the U.N. Security Council in 1993 and 1994 to investigate war crimes in the former Yugoslavia and in Rwanda. But as Mrs Bonino admits, the temporary nature of these courts means that they can achieve too little, too late and too inefficiently.

The trouble with these jurisdictions is that they are not only ad hoc, they are post-hoc. "They are only set up long after the crimes have taken place," she says. "What we need is a permanent court structure with a standing mandate and universal rules which would also

create a powerful deterrent against crimes and criminals that the international community can not tolerate."

The courts have to struggle with structural and logistical problems, improvising as they go along. And the costs of this ad hoc system of justice comes on top of an existing precarious U.N. budget.

Only a strong court will be effective

The European Commission believes that what is needed is a court with inherent jurisdiction over a core group of crimes – genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, including those committed in the course of civil wars and other internal conflicts. It insists that no additional state consent should be required by the parties.

"Would anyone seriously expect Saddam Hussein to agree to an investigation of alleged genocide against the Kurds in northern Iraq in 1988?" Mrs Bonino says.

The Court should also have a constructive relationship with other international institutions and with the United Nations Security Council in particular. The court should have an independent prosecutor, able to initiate proceedings of his or her own accord.

The court's effectiveness will depend on its being and perceived to be an impartial and independent judicial body guided by legal rather than purely political considerations. If states and the Security Council alone can trigger the jurisdiction of the court it will always be perceived as a political tool, says Mrs Bonino.

"And many deserving cases would never come to court because no state wishes to pay the economic, political

and diplomatic price of issuing complaints against the individual of another member state."

The world community comes to Rome largely at one on the need to create the ICC, after years and years of stalling.

But the devil is in the detail and there remains the real danger that the court the world so badly needs for the next century will be a court without teeth.

In the knowledge that powerful voices within the United States Senate harbour deep reservations over the court's role, Mrs Bonino sought on a recent visit to the United States to end the misconceptions she fears will leave the court without the credibility to fulfil its role properly.

The United States in particular wants the court to come under the authority of the UN Security Council and wants states to have the power of veto.

Mrs Bonino stresses that the court will not undermine national sovereignty or replace national courts. It will only act when national courts have proved incapable or unwilling to act and punish the most serious crimes.

Reacting to such concerns, she believes the world will have "more collective common sense" than to use the court to punish peacekeepers who commit crimes on difficult peacekeeping missions.

And she asks: is a continuation of barbarism something the world can afford? After all, the indictment by the Hague tribunal of Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic helped to marginalise two of the most violent opponents of the ethnic coexistence which lies at the heart of the Dayton peace plan.

Mrs. Bonino's remarks were made during speeches on her recent visit to the United States.

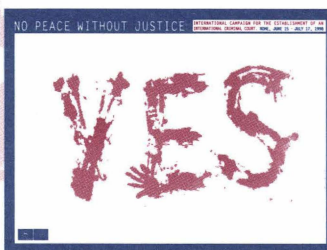


IMAGE: FABRICA. © TOSCANI'S RESEARCH CENTRE OF COMMUNICATION

Providing shelter in Colombia

Nearly three quarters of a million people, most of them children, have been forced to flee their rural homes in Colombia with just the clothes on their backs in search of safety. They have become the innocent targets of an increasingly violent internal power struggle between guerrillas, drug barons and the army. "Safety" when they find it can mean sleeping in a cardboard box on the streets of the country's main cities, vulnerable to spiralling urban violence and poverty. Basic humanitarian aid can not prevent people being expelled from their homes. But since 1996, ECHO has been trying to ensure that these displaced people at least have access to food, shelter and basic medical care.

Target in struggle

If Colombia's rural population has become a target of Colombia's long-running power struggle, it is no accident. By expelling innocent civilians from their villages, Colombia's paramilitary groups can gain territory from the big landowners, breaking up this vital source of guerrilla support. The rural population is driven off the land by a new government policy of scorching thousands of acres in a bid to crack down on the drug barons. Once in the big city, life is hard for cardboard box dwellers. Fearing reprisals in a society



PHOTO © : CARLOS ANGEL/GAMMA

built on shady informal power alliances, they are too afraid to register with the authorities, reducing their already limited access to medical care to zero. They are unable to afford a balanced diet, so malnutrition sets in, especially in young and pregnant women. Even the more fortunate ones who manage to stay with relatives in rural areas can not escape hunger: they end up sharing normally abundant resources there with the large numbers of displaced people living out in the open.

"Without ECHO to provide aid, the situation would be far worse," says ECHO's co-ordinator Juan Luis Dominguez-Gonzalez. "ECHO is the only international

presence that can provide aid to around 40 to 50 local and European NGOs. And through its presence, ECHO can at least try to provide some reinforcement for respect of international humanitarian law."

Fight for aid

ECHO aid is often a substitute for official emergency provisions, which sometimes arrive late and sometimes not at all. ECHO's underlying aim is to ensure that displaced people can survive, so that when stability is restored in their area they are able to return home. But even ECHO and other humanitarian agencies are not immune from Colombia's power battle. Their mandate may limit them to acting on strictly humanitarian grounds.

In Colombia they can easily be dragged into the political arena against their will. As the civilian population increasingly becomes a target in the conflict, humanitarian aid can be interpreted by warring parties as an obstacle to their goal.

In 1997 some national and international humanitarian agencies allegedly suffered threats from paramilitary groups, leading Amnesty International to leave. This means that ECHO's coordinators work in a high-risk situation which can hinder the effective delivery of humanitarian aid.



ECHO's global reach

AFGHANISTAN

DEVASTATED BY SECOND EARTHQUAKE



PHOTO © TERRANCE WHITE/RSP/GAMMA

Afghanistan was trying to come to terms with the earthquake which struck in February, when on May 30 it was hit again, by an even more devastating quake. Measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale, it is reported to have affected 1,750 square kilometres, a much larger area than the earlier quake. Up to 120 villages are believed to have sustained damage, nearly 4,500 people killed, and a further 2,000-3,000 injured. The toll is likely to rise with the effects of aftershocks and landslides.

The situation is aggravated by the ongoing war. Afghanistan's social infrastructure is already in ruins and incapable of responding to such a crisis once, let alone twice. So on receiving news of the earthquake, ECHO immediately sent a co-ordinator to the area and approved ECU 1.5 million for aid organisations implementing projects to ensure health, water, sanitation, relief items and basic shelter.

The task ahead is a difficult one. Even those who did not lose their homes in the quakes live in fear of yet another tremor and refuse to live under their own roof. Aid agencies, although no longer battling against winter cold, are coming up against a treacherous terrain and heavy rains. In response to the crisis, the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations have sent two aircraft, each equipped with medical supplies. Non-governmental organisations including Médecins sans Frontières-Belgium and Merlin (UK) are sending medical teams by road.

Since 1995, ECHO has given more than ECU 80 million in grants for humanitarian aid in Afghanistan, not including this latest funding of ECU 1.5 million.

EL NIÑO-UPDATE

EL NIÑO HAVOC FROM BRAZIL TO INDONESIA

In June the World Meteorological Organisation reported that El Niño "is in its dying stages". However, it continued to be destructive worldwide.

After a season of El Niño-related drought, farmers in Roraima in the north of Brazil were faced with devastation when their traditional land-clearing fires went wildly out of control, spreading as far as Costa Rica. Torrential rain extinguished them, but those affected became dependent on outside assistance. In Indonesia, there were attempts to curb the fire-setting, following the blazes which razed five million hectares of forest, agricultural land and bush, inflicting severe damage on land and people. Further drought was expected.

Since December, heavy rains have caused severe flooding in Paraguay and Argentina, forcing people to abandon their homes. Nearly 65,000 people have been affected so far. Flooding also hit Uruguay. Nearly 10,000 people had to be evacuated. The delivery of aid, already difficult, has been hampered by the approach of winter in the southern hemisphere.

ECHO has aimed to ensure the effective co-ordination of funds to meet urgent needs, providing relief in the form of medical aid and in implementing measures to control the possible outbreak of epidemics.

The European Commission has approved humanitarian aid worth ECU one million to help cope with the effects of forest fires in Brazil, along with ECU one million for Indonesia. It has given ECU 300,000 for Paraguay and Argentina, ECU 300,000 to cope with droughts in Bolivia, and ECU 300,000 for Uruguay.



PHOTO © J.L. BUICAO/GAMMA

KOSOVO

ESSENTIAL AID IN ONGOING KOSOVO CONFLICT

The situation in Kosovo is changing by the day and getting aid to the victims of the crisis in the Serbian province is proving difficult. The exact number of people affected is difficult to establish in the conflict between the Serbs and the ethnic Albanian majority. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates the number of internally displaced people within the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to be 45,000.

Unwilling to talk

In Kosovo itself many people have fled their homes to find shelter with families or friends. Yet they are unwilling to talk for fear of reprisals. Added to that, aid organisations are being denied access to the areas where internally displaced persons are presumed to be, such as Mitrovica and Djakovica. During a recent evaluation mission to Kosovo, ECHO's Desk Officer Diamantoula Triantafyllou was frequently turned back by the Serbian police as she tried with UN agencies and NGOs to gather information about the numbers and needs of displaced people. There are also concerns for the safety of most of the 13,000 refugees, mainly Serbs from Croatia, who are trapped in collective centres within Kosovo.

ECHO's 1998 budget so far in Kosovo is ECU two million, mainly for health projects. In Montenegro, Serbia's partner in the Yugoslav Federation, around 10,000 people from Kosovo are being put up with families, where they are being treated with essential supplies provided by the local Red Cross. ECHO is already contributing food supplies through the World Food Programme (WFP) to complement what the local community provides.

Exhausted after trek

In neighbouring Albania, 12,000 refugees from Kosovo, exhausted after a two-day trek across the highland border, have arrived in Tropoje and Bajram Curri, a very poor northern region. Of those people 85 percent are women and children. ECHO is distributing 50 tonnes of canned beef to cover immediate protein needs and has agreed with the WFP that some of ECHO's contingency stock piles in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia be made available for the Kosovo refugees. The situation appeared stable as ECHO News went to press, but ECHO has provisionally agreed new aid of ECU 1.5 million. This will allow for the distribution of food parcels, hygiene packs, bed linen and the construction of a collective centre to accommodate new arrivals.

Following a recent appeal from the United Nations for funds, ECHO, in close co-operation with UNHCR, is preparing a contingency plan in case the crisis in Kosovo escalates. Such escalation could have consequences for the whole region, including Kosovo, Montenegro, Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.



PHOTO © UN

ECHO in the field:

THE COORDINATORS

At the end of June a unique event took place in Brussels. Seventy ECHO coordinators working in different countries and regions around the world gathered for a week-long seminar. For many of them it was their first opportunity to meet colleagues and openly discuss their problems and concerns. Chief among those concerns was their own safety and that of their local staff in an increasingly dangerous environment.

Coordinators are the women and men who go to areas where ECHO has earmarked large amounts of money. They monitor projects and coordinate with co-operating non-governmental organisations and international agencies so that projects are carried out as planned. Where on-the-spot negotiations are needed, it is up to the coordinators to do it.

"It is essential to be able to take a decision and to be responsible," said Janny Boscher, ECHO's coordinator in Tadjikistan, who attended the Brussels seminar. "NGOs will often be looking to you as a representative of the international community and wait for your example. This kind of responsibility can not be abused."

Pivotal role in humanitarian aid

This pivotal role is not one for the faint-hearted. People who take water supplies, sanitation and home comforts for granted need not apply. Coordinators' lives are dictated by the disasters they have been called on to manage, and no sooner one crisis over, they may have to deal with another.

How do you help an Afghan family shivering in minus 20 degrees temperatures after their home collapsed in an earthquake? How do you deal with a shell-shocked woman arriving penniless in Albania with her children to flee the fighting in Kosovo? How do you help Bolivian



ECHO coordinators Marit Van Strien and Nick Weatherill discuss projects for the Great Lakes.

farmers who have lost 30,000 hectares of land because of flooding caused by El Niño? For coordinators, it is all in a day's work. For this crucial task only people with highly-specialised experience in the humanitarian aid field will do.

Highly-skilled personnel

A typical coordinator might have a background as a specialised engineer dealing with water and sanitation, or a medical doctor or nurse. They must also be good communicators: nurturing good relations is central to the role. Often an effective funding strategy is determined by good relations established between the NGO concerned, the coordinator and the desk officer.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross have pooled forces recently to highlight the dangers of humanitarian aid work. Coordinators at the Brussels seminar were anxious to express their own fears. They fear not only for their own lives, but for those of their locally-hired staff who are often seen as turning against their own people and siding with the Commission. Local staff would not be part of any evacuation effort if things go wrong. But speakers

acknowledged that a sense of humility and an open-mind can help increase acceptability when visiting beneficiary countries.

"When you are making sure that aid reaches people in a culture that is based on values that are completely different from your own, sometimes you are defending your own values by simply determining the need for aid. People of a different culture may not understand your decision and simply see your decision as a gesture of political interference. You have to rethink and question yourself," said Sandrine Chopin, an ECHO coordinator for Afghanistan. There are three in Kabul.

Defining parameters of ECHO's role

"We have to learn to define the parameters of humanitarian aid and define where ECHO's role actually begins and ends. If not, the boundary is too blurred. In some countries, such as East Timor, aid can only get in on the condition that it is humanitarian aid and has no strings attached. If we do not define it, we risk not being able to give anything at all and put ourselves in danger", said Patricia Penetier, a graduate of the Network on Humanitarian Assistance (NOHA) programme in Aix-en-Provence, now based in Bangkok as a coordinator for Laos and Vietnam.

ECHO flight: a unique operation for the Horn of Africa

You are an aid worker in Southern Sudan and you realise it is almost impossible to reach Bahr el Ghazal by road due to flooding. But 29% of the children under five there are suffering from severe malnutrition. The population is so weak that the most badly affected people have virtually no chance of travelling to the relief station. But the conflict in the area is intensifying and you fear for the safety of your team.

So what do you do?

In many humanitarian aid operations an aeroplane is used for far more than just delivering food. In the high-risk region of the Horn of Africa, the availability of an aeroplane can mean the difference between life and death for aid workers who may need to evacuate at a moment's notice. And unless aid organisations know they can get out quickly when fighting escalates, they might not go in at all. In this knowledge, the European Commission launched the ECHO Flight operation in 1994 and has just provided ECU 8.8 million to ensure that this important lifeline for the Horn of Africa can survive well into 1999.

The availability of an aeroplane via the ECHO Flight operation can make all the difference to the decision you take. With 200 landing strips in Somalia, South Sudan and Kenya, ECHO Flight means that NGOs are guaranteed flights that get their staff and cargo in, with increased efficiency, flexibility and security. Even more importantly, it means they can rest assured that a plane is available at a moment's notice to get them out. That can be important if you are based in Mogadishu.

Since the first plane took off in May 1994, the operation has clocked up over 42,000 flight hours and now has seven planes based in Nairobi, Djibouti,

Mandera, Bamako and Lokichoggio. Life is not easy for the 65 ground staff who face challenges such as ground strips being ploughed up into farmland, and armed groups attempting extortion. But against the odds of civil war, banditry and dust storms, ECHO flights have had no casualties or flight-related accidents since they started.

Over 100 NGOs financed by ECHO have access to the service completely free of charge. ECHO Flight passengers have included Action Contre la Faim, Médecins sans Frontières, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and Save the Children Fund, to name just a few.

ECHO in-flight: Passengers of Belgian airline Sabena's long-haul flights are being introduced to ECHO while they travel. A five-minute-long film on ECHO's action in all four corners of the world is being shown before their in-flight entertainment. The film will include, among other actions, the role of ECHO Flight in the Horn of Africa, demonstrating the crucial role played by air transport in carrying humanitarian supplies and personnel in high-risk zones.