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Echo News

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Restoring hope in Mozambique

Just a few weeks ago, Mozambique was a beacon of hope for Africa. After a lengthy civil war, its citizens had set a course for peace. They are living proof for other war-torn countries on the African continent and elsewhere that peace and development are attainable after bloody conflict. De-mining had begun and the structures of a healthy civil society were thriving. Just as good, the country was enjoying an economic renaissance. Then came the rains, a terrible cyclone, and devastating floods from rivers originating outside Mozambique itself. In days, the waters washed away the work of years.

I went there to see for myself the towns worst hit in the Limpopo River region, and saw 28,000 survivors gathered in the Chaquelane camp.

My message for Mozambique is this: the European Union is not only addressing the short term, urgent needs but we will also be there long after the TV cameras have gone home. The European Union is committed to help for as long as need be. We are providing emergency relief now, and will continue to do so to avert hunger and epidemics in the short term. In the medium and long term, we will stand together with the people of Mozambique to rebuild their lives and their country.

Poul Nielson

Death toll set to climb, page 3



Photo: M. Leco/Mediasnews



Photo: Pinaroo/Sunday Times/STN

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Venezuela begins to rebuild

Two weeks of heavy rain in December brought hundreds of mudslides thundering down steep mountainsides to the coast, where entire settlements were wiped out in a matter of minutes. As the death toll continues to mount, hundreds of thousands of families are without shelter and clean water. As well as food supplies, the region needs support for reconstruction of housing, infrastructure and social services.

Mozambique's cruel devastation

Torrential rains and a cyclone hit the coast of south-eastern Africa in early February, bringing raging floods that devastated countless villages and affected about a million people. Subsiding floodwaters have left many at risk from disease and are revealing the true magnitude of the tragedy. Thousands have disappeared. With crops destroyed, some 23,000 children under the age of five face severe malnutrition.

Ethiopia: European Union pledges food aid

The Ethiopian government has appealed for over 800,000 tonnes of food aid to meet acute shortages in the country, where the effects of drought have been exacerbated by growing numbers of people displaced because of conflict with Eritrea. Most of this appeal has now been covered by pledges from the international community, and the Commission has programmed an initial delivery of 225,000 tonnes, to be complemented by further commitments. ECHO has also funded the International Committee of the Red Cross to provide supplementary feeding and oil. More aid is in the pipeline.



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INTERVIEW

Matters of life or death



DR JAMES ORBINSKI
The President of the MSF International Council calls on governments to make life-saving medicines available to those who need them

Another example: in Sub-Saharan Africa, there are about 60 million people at risk of sleeping sickness, trypanosomiasis, an extremely painful and debilitating disease spread by tsetse flies, which claims more than 55,000 lives a year. It is treatable with a drug called DFMO. 'At this point in time, production of that drug has all but stopped,' Orbinski warns.

MSF's campaign is not restricted to Africa. The countries of the former Soviet Union too are undergoing major problems. Here and elsewhere, tuberculosis, far from being eradicated like smallpox, is spreading. This year, three million people will die of TB, and eight million people will develop the disease, almost all in poor countries.

The World Health Organisation estimates that if left unchecked, TB could kill more than

Winning the Nobel Peace Prize for 1999 won't change what Médecins sans Frontières does in the field — but it should prompt the world to take more notice of issues the organisation highlights in its campaigning work. That is the view of Dr James Orbinski, President of the Médecins sans Frontières International Council. 'It won't make any difference to what we do in the field, but I hope and expect it to bring the questions, challenges and paradoxes in today's world to the forefront of people's attention — it will add weight to our actions and to our voice,' he explained.

The organisation has earmarked the \$1 million Nobel Prize money for a campaign to promote access to essential medicines. The campaign, launched in 1999, is intended to mobilise governments to back major public health campaigns that will make life-saving medicines available at affordable prices to the people that need them most in poor countries.

'Many medicines are not being produced because they are not seen as profitable'

'At the moment, many such medicines are not easily accessible,' Orbinski said. Some are just too expensive. Others may exist, but are not being produced because they are not seen as profitable. In other cases, there is simply no effective research on tropical diseases, which are not seen as a priority by drug companies more interested in profit-spinning cures for baldness, impotence or obesity in industrialised countries.

'Our campaign is rooted in our field experience,' Orbinski stressed. In Kenya, for instance, medication for AIDS-related meningitis costs about \$20 per treatment. In Thailand, the same medication, fluconazol, costs just 70 cents a treatment because no patent applies. 'So people in Kenya who have AIDS-related meningitis will likely die because they can't afford treatment. We experience that kind of situation every day in many places around the world.'

'TB represents a tragic failure to use medical advances for the wider benefit of humankind'

70 million people world-wide in the next 20 years, and infect nearly one billion more. Most will go untreated.

In Orbinski's view, TB represents a tragic failure to use medical advances for the wider benefit of humankind. Despite the explosion of scientific knowledge and techniques over the past two decades, the last innovation in drugs to treat TB was developed over 30 years ago. The vaccine still in use today was developed in 1923.

Speaking on the eve of World TB Day on March 24, Orbinski called for short, simple therapies. 'Current treatments are long and cumbersome, with enormous labour costs for governments. Each treatment lasts 6-8 months, but patients start to feel better quite early on and drop out. Uncured, they pass the disease on to others. This leads to the development of drug-resistance, making old drugs redundant and subsequent treatment prohibitively expensive (US\$ 5,000 to 8,000 per patient).'

Orbinski said it was clear that drug companies would not respond spontaneously to today's needs. 'We must move beyond debates about 'market forces' and 'commercial incentives'. We are facing a global public health challenge, and governments must either intervene in the market, or establish their own capacity to promote research and development for new, affordable, effective drugs and vaccines. Governments should lead the way, and develop a system for sharing the burden.'

James Orbinski was speaking to Eva Kaluzynska of ECHO Information

Venezuela

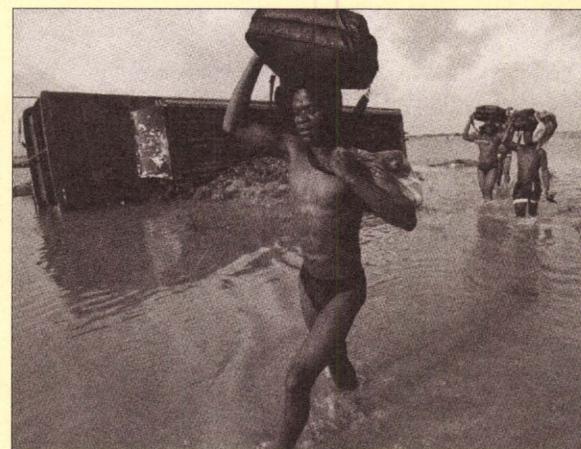
Since the landslides in December, which may have cost up to 30,000 lives, many families are still at risk. Unable to rebuild their lives or their homes, they face the rainy season without food or shelter. Local authorities and relief agencies are helping in the worst affected areas

After the shock of deadly mudslides in December, the rebuilding of shattered lives has begun, but recovery is still far from a reality for Venezuela. The rainy season looms and while government, local authorities, NGOs, relief agencies and the military responded swiftly to the emergency, thousands are still vulnerable.

Two weeks of heavy rain caused flash floods that carried mud, debris, boulders and vegetation from hundreds of mudslides down steep mountain slopes to the coast, where dense urban settlements had sprung up. They were wiped out by walls of mud and rock. The destruction stretched along 50 to 60 km of the coastal state of Vargas, the hardest-hit region.

How many lost their lives? The figure could be as high as 30,000. We may never know. Most of those in the crowded shantytowns were not registered. A third of Caracas' six million inhabitants live in vulnerable housing, made of corrugated iron, plastic sheeting and flimsy wood. Environmental degradation in river catchment areas made the area particularly vulnerable.

Today, about 200,000 people are living in temporary



As floodwaters recede, cholera and malaria may claim many more victims

Counts cost of landslides



Venezuela, December 1999

shelters or with relatives. Another 200,000 are still without safe water in the state of Miranda. The rupture of a dam in the state of Falcon displaced more than 20,000. Widespread flooding in other states, Anzoategui, Nueva Esparta, Zulia and Sucre, caused damage to the water supply, waste water system, road network and farmland.

Clearing the debris and cleaning up rivers and sanitation systems are underway. Local authorities, with relief agencies, are providing basic infrastructure and social services in affected areas.

Help to rebuild

Hundreds of thousands of families affected by the devastation need help to rebuild their lives. As well as daily subsistence and the rebuilding of homes, the region needs support for the reconstruction of damaged infrastructure.

According to a European Commission source, the catastrophe was exacerbated by the density of poorly-built homes that should not have been on such vulnerable land. People want to return to their "homes" in the Vargas region, where about 60 per cent of the territory has been destroyed.

Reconstruction may be neither feasible nor desirable.

The European Commission, through ECHO, provided €400,000 last December and, in a second decision, allocated €3.2 million to support the work of seven humanitarian operations. In February, ECHO made available a further €2 million to assist six NGOs in reducing the risk to epidemics, restoring the availability of drinking water, health care, an epidemiological surveillance system and psychosocial support for traumatised children. €80,000 has been reserved to cover the cost of opening an ECHO office in Caracas.

The grim statistics

419,000 persons affected
2,545 people missing
349 official death count*
81,137 buildings and houses affected
26,147 houses destroyed
 Damage estimated at **US\$3.2 billion**, or 3.3 per cent of GDP

*Source: Government statistics. Some estimates are as high as 30,000. Because the disaster occurred at night, many more families may have disappeared than known.

Mozambique death toll expected to climb

The heaviest rains in half a century devastated southern Africa in February. Cyclone Eline, with winds of 60 km per hour, followed raging floods. Mozambique was worst hit. Swollen rivers burst their banks, affecting an estimated million people.

Cholera and malaria are major health hazards, and some 23,000 children under five face severe malnutrition. The death toll, put at 500, is expected to climb as waters recede. Landmines shifted by floodwaters are another unwelcome danger. In Botswana, about 25,000 people were affected, while in Madagascar, over 600,000 people were displaced from coastal cities and villages. Commissioner Paul Nielson announced more than €25 million in aid,

about €10 million of it for emergency relief. At a meeting with Mozambican authorities on the spot, he stressed the need to link relief aid to a longer-term regeneration programme.

ECHO sent a team to Maputo to develop the EC's response in consultation with a UN-backed initiative. ECHO-funded Red Cross and NGO operations have been underway for several weeks. Elsewhere, in addition to emergency funding for Botswana, ECHO sent needs assessment teams to Zimbabwe, Zambia and Madagascar.

Now ECHO will focus on aid to farmers in Mozambique. DG Development is offering funding of €150 million against €100 for 1999.

ECHO's Global Reach

Sudan: Aid suspended for SPLA rebel-held areas. The European Commission has earmarked **€11 million** for humanitarian aid in Sudan over the next nine months. But up to a third of that total, destined for certain rebel-held areas in the south, will be released only if the aid can be distributed according to international humanitarian principles. This aid is being channelled via the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO).

The Commission decided on March 1 to suspend funding for humanitarian operations in areas controlled by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which expelled non-governmental organisations that had refused to sign an SPLA-sponsored Memorandum of Understanding. The Commission and NGOs concerned decided the terms of the Memorandum would severely restrict operations and set a dangerous precedent.

If the Commission and its implementing partners can make progress in a way that enables NGOs to resume implementing assistance according to humanitarian principles, this decision could be reconsidered.

The 17-year war in Sudan has cost over 1.5 million lives and led to the near-total collapse of all structures in the south. Prospects for lasting peace are still remote.

In both Government of Sudan and in rebel-held territory in the south, the aim of this Global Plan is to halt depletion of the vital necessities for survival in a war-weakened population. Priority sectors are therefore the same: primary and secondary health-care, food security and water/sanitation projects. Logistics and security structures run by United Nations agencies on behalf of Operation Lifeline Sudan will also get support.

Indonesia: (Aceh, Molucca Islands, Madura) – aid for thousands fleeing ongoing ethnic conflict. **€3 million** provides shelter, water and sanitation. ECHO's partners include: MPDL (Spain), Oxfam (UK), Action contre la Faim (France) Médecins sans Frontières (Belgium).

Zambia: aid for Congolese refugees. **€1.225 million** in emergency aid for more than 25,000 Congolese refugees who have fled to escape conflict. ECHO supports UNHCR in providing food, health-care, water and sanitation facilities, a kit of essentials and providing primary schools for 5,000 children. One-year project.

Getting through to Chechnya

Many civilians inside and outside Chechnya are struggling to survive a dirty war – without the humanitarian help they need. Because of the security situation, ECHO has only been able to spend half the money it has earmarked for this emergency.

At time of writing, €7.4 million had been made available for victims of the conflict, but only about €3.4 million had been spent. ECHO's partners are the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Commissioner Poul Nielson visited border camps in Ingushetia where those who had fled Grozny were sheltering. He saw for himself the conditions under which they were enduring the winter.



Photo: Heidi Brauner/Spa Press

Russian troops patrol Grozny as civilians wander through the ruins

The security situation is so dangerous in the region that ECHO and its partners are able to work only by 'remote control', thanks to locally-hired staff. Russia is unwilling to make available radio frequencies for the use of humanitarian organisations, and without hand-held radios, a basic essential for security in the field, NGOs are not prepared to expose staff to unnecessary danger.

Nielson called on the Russian authorities to open a humanitarian corridor, guaranteeing the safety and security of humanitarian staff prepared to go into the country to enable the international community to make available the help needed.

As we went to press, Western leaders were congratulating Russia's new President, Vladimir Putin, but called on him to end the war. Javier Solana, the top foreign policy official of the European Union, Russia's biggest trading partner, urged Putin to take "clear and decisive steps" towards a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Chechnya.

No peace in sight after three decades of war in Angola

Two generations of Angolans have known nothing but brutal civil war. The former Portuguese colony has been a theatre of war for more than 30 years. The escalation of the conflict in December 1998 has ruled out the prospect of peace in the foreseeable future.

Horror stories trickle out of the country — several regions are restricted to NGOs and the news media — yet the plight of its 13 million people remains almost completely ignored by most of the world. The deteriorating humanitarian situation prompted UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to appeal to the donor community last June to "urgently support humanitarian activities in Angola to avoid a massive human tragedy". Yet the tragedy unfolds daily. Millions of citizens are caught between two warring factions. The conflict

between the government, dominated for the past 25 years by the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), and the rebel forces of the National Union for the Total Liberation of Angola (UNITA), has left more than two million people internally displaced. More than 300,000 have fled the violence to seek shelter in some of the neighbouring countries, mainly the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia and Namibia.

About one-third of the population are in areas inaccessible to humanitarian aid. Since March 1999 there has been no humanitarian assistance to those in



Photo: By Today

No relief for landmine victims: 20 million mines already lie in the soil, and others are being sown every day

Horror stories trickle out, yet the plight of Angola's 13 million people remains almost completely ignored

UNITA-controlled territory. Where NGOs still have access, relief action is threatened by violence, attacks, landmines and bombings. An estimated 20 million landmines lie in the soil with more being sown every day.

Despite these conditions, international relief efforts continue. Most humanitarian aid is distributed by air, an effort threatened by lack of funding. This year, the European Commission, through ECHO, is funding €13.5 million of aid to support humanitarian programmes, particularly in the sectors of health, nutrition, water and sanitation, emergency relief and air transport through more than 25 NGO partners in the field.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/echo/en/index_en.html

Funding for training and information projects: ECHO has funding available for training and for information, communication and awareness-raising projects in the field of humanitarian aid. For full details of the types of activities eligible and how to apply, visit the following page on our website: http://europa.eu.int/comm/echo/en/finances/finan_en.html. (Scroll to the bottom of the page.) Please note that the scheme is only open to humanitarian organisations. Individuals may not apply.

