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## ▶ Reacting to earthquakes

Just a few weeks into the new millennium, natural catastrophes have struck on opposite sides of the world. In January, a powerful earthquake hit El Salvador and less than two weeks later, the movements of the earth's crust brought chaos and destruction to India. A fortnight after that, El Salvador was struck yet again.

While speculation continues over the exact toll of dead and injured in the Gujarat tragedy, it is clear that there has been a coordinated and effective humanitarian response from Europe and from the other international donors. This was illustrated by the comments of a member of a Red Cross emergency team, arriving at Zurich Airport after working to save people buried under collapsed buildings in Gujarat. Referring to the successes of the rescue teams who went in immediately after the earthquake struck, she said: "Less than half an hour after we began work, we succeeded in getting out two people who had been trapped in the rubble - and they were able to walk away without help. It is the first time I have seen this happen."

The Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) is continuing with its work of ensuring that victims of the disaster get the vital assistance they need. On 27 January, the day after the earthquake struck, the Commission announced an initial contribution of €3 million to pay for the immediate relief efforts of ECHO's NGO partners on the ground. At the same time, an ECHO expert in the region was dispatched to Gujarat to undertake a needs assessment.

As the huge scale of the crisis became known, the Commission moved quickly to increase its contribution. On 31 January, a second financing decision for €10 million was announced. At the time ECHO News went



Gujarat, India

to press, the main priority was still to meet the immediate needs of the victims (essential medical services, food and drinking water distribution, shelter and clothing).

The El Salvador earthquake on 13 January claimed more than 800 lives. Here too, ECHO responded speedily. A first decision for €2 million was adopted less than five days after the disaster struck and the operational contracts were finalised in record time. A month later, a further earthquake hit El Salvador with the loss of more than 250 lives. ECHO reacted promptly, mobilising further significant resources.

Seismic events may be synonymous with tragedy but they can also have unexpected consequences. Under the

flag of international solidarity, a new and positive trend seems to be developing, in particular involving neighbouring countries historically viewed as adversaries. In August 1999, a violent earthquake hit the Marmara region of Turkey. The government and people of Greece were among the first to express their solidarity and send help, thereby holding out prospects for improved relations between the two countries.

The same phenomenon, dubbed "earthquake diplomacy" by some commentators, has been observed in the case of the Indian earthquake. Paradoxically, this terrible tragedy might just open the way to a fresh dialogue and better links between India and Pakistan.

## Olara Otunnu, the children's champion

ECHO News interviewed Olara Otunnu, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, when he visited Brussels recently. We began by asking him the purpose of his visit.

Regional organisations are crucial in promoting the protection of children affected by conflict. The EU is one of the most important, engaged and sophisticated regional organisations so, from the beginning of my mandate, I have wanted to cultivate interest here. I have been discussing raising awareness generally and making the issue a subject of advocacy in the EU. In the European Parliament, a number of members are now deeply engaged in this and there have been hearings and resolutions, especially on the question of child soldiers. I should also mention that the EU played an important role in putting in place the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict.

We cooperate closely with ECHO and are currently discussing how the Commission might help with rehabilitating child soldiers in Sierra Leone. So we are moving, if you like, from a principled commitment to practical measures.

Another success has been in the new ACP-EU relationship. I am pleased that, after long discussions, there is now an article on youth issues in the Cotonou Agreement which includes a section on helping children affected by conflicts.

**Q. How useful is all the effort that has gone into strengthening the international rules given that, when conflict erupts, respect for legal norms is often the first casualty?**

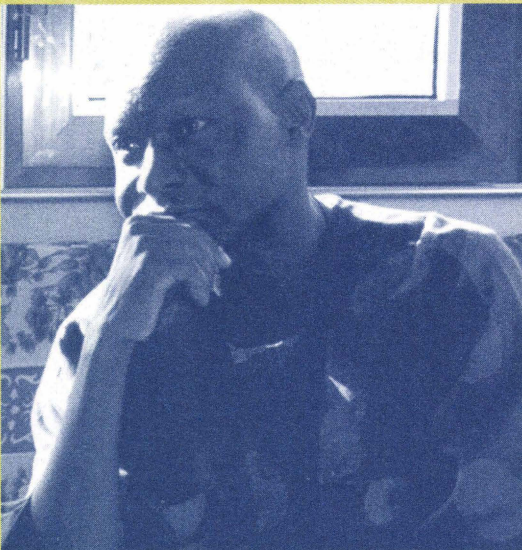
The starting point is to agree on common or universal standards. With the Optional Protocol, it was important to raise the age limit for participation in conflict to 18 and we achieved this. We wanted the same limit for recruitment but ended up with a minimum age of 16 - which is still an improvement on the present situation.

The next stage is to put the new standards into practice. How do we do this? One thing is to deploy them as advocacy tools in the field. We have to say very clearly to the fighting groups: "You must not use children below 18. There are now international standards which make this unacceptable."

Of course, we must also address the factors that make it easy for children to be exploited as soldiers. For example, socio-economic collapse may make membership of armed groups attractive simply because there are no better alternatives. Then there is the appeal of ideology - which can have a religious, ethnic, or some other basis - that draws children to these groups and makes them feel they are contributing to the struggle.

It is also vital to improve capacity on the ground for responding to the needs of children who have been used as soldiers. The existing means are inadequate. In many places, if armed groups were to apply the new standards and release their child soldiers, we wouldn't be able to deal with them. So we need more support for UNICEF, the relevant NGOs and national governments, to rehabilitate and reintegrate these children.

**Q. When ECHO News last spoke to you, Kosovo was high on the agenda. How satisfied are you with efforts to restore normality to the lives of children who were displaced so abruptly in 1999?**



Kosovo is a good example of the new awareness being created about post-conflict situations. We are beginning to devote special attention to the needs of the children affected by the conflict and, in this sense, Kosovo has benefited from our advocacy work. It is also beginning to pay off in Sierra Leone and East Timor.

The work began in Albania and Macedonia after the refugees from Kosovo arrived and it has been developed further in the context of their return and resettlement. There was a good response to the children's needs and we must obviously consolidate this. But one aspect still troubles me. At present, things are highly polarised in Kosovo and young people have been drawn into this. We must find a way to break the cycle - through education, radio and TV broadcasts and other targeted programmes, designed to make them part of the reconciliation process and not part of the continuation

of the war by other means.

**Q. It must sometimes seem an uphill struggle trying to organise advocacy on behalf of war-affected children. Are you ever discouraged?**

It is a huge and daunting task but we have made tangible progress. For example, public awareness has risen considerably, and political leaders now pay more attention to the issue. The Security Council has affirmed that protecting children in conflicts is a legitimate peace and security concern. This is being followed up with concrete measures.

One innovation is the new role of "child protection advisor". These are people attached directly to peacekeeping missions with the task of ensuring that children's interests get a proper hearing. In periodic reports to the Security Council on the situation in conflict areas, there are now sections devoted specifically to children. We are also working to develop special training programmes in this area for peacekeeping personnel.

Another encouraging aspect is the growing engagement of regional organisations. I mentioned the good example of the European Commission. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the G8 and ECOWAS in West Africa have all put the subject on their agendas as well. Then there are the NGOs, who are doing more than ever before. They contributed significantly to the efforts to have the Optional Protocol adopted and are developing more field activities to respond to the needs of children affected by conflict.

We must obviously do more. We need to create a critical mass of activities out of these efforts and begin translating the norms into realities. And we have to expand the effort beyond what I or other official bodies can do, to embrace a broader set of actors and stakeholders.

One thing, which is a genuine source of inspiration to me, has sustained my optimism. I inevitably witness suffering, hatred and despair in the conflict areas I visit. But I am also impressed by the extraordinary efforts of local people, often women, to protect and defend children. Many of them have never even heard of the Geneva and UN Conventions or of our various agencies. I could give you examples from Juba to Burundi to Kosovo. We need to learn more from them and to reinforce their efforts.

## So their learning may continue

More than 600 refugee children aged six to twelve are waiting in two West Timor camps for the green light from the UN Security Coordinator's office in New York before they can continue with their education.

Last August, ECHO's partner, Save the Children UK, was preparing to launch its "Emergency Camp Schools for Primary School Aged Refugee Children in Kupang". The project includes the provision of "student kits" containing the basic materials that local teachers need - books, a portable blackboard, chalk, writing tablets and other materials.

The crisis then escalated, culminating in the murder of three UNHCR workers on September 6. Humanitarian efforts were suspended and 460 aid workers were evacuated. The €600,000 project was put on hold pending the UN mission's security assessment.

The Indonesian government says that the region is secure but admits that not all weapons have been collected. A UN decision was expected at about the time *ECHO News* went to press. ECHO and its partner are hoping to move forward with what is expected to be a model project to support children affected by war.



## ▶ Children in peril

**Children around the globe are being abused and brutalised. They are caught up in a violent adult world of armed conflict and its destructive aftermath. Today, this tragedy is unfolding in 50 countries.**

**Over the last decade:**

- > 2 million children have died as a direct or indirect result of armed conflict;
- > 1 million have been orphaned;
- > more than 6 million have been seriously injured, with many permanently disabled;
- > 10 million have suffered serious psychological trauma;
- > more than 20 million have been displaced from their home areas;
- > approximately 800 were killed or maimed by landmines every month;
- > some 300,000 youths under 18 have been exploited as child soldiers in 30 conflict zones.

Every day, children in conflict zones are the victims of violence and abuse, including sexual assaults. They are uprooted from their homes and deprived of education and health care. This leaves them with deep emotional scars and lasting trauma. Despite international recognition and concern, children today are increasingly targets of and participants in armed conflict. Reports from the field continue to bear witness to sickness and malnutrition, killing and maiming, abduction and 'recruitment'.

### **International concern - a good start, but not enough**

The plight of war-affected children has attracted international attention. Broad consensus that the rights of the child must be respected was affirmed in August 1999 by the unanimous vote at the UN Security Council for Resolution 1261 on Children and Armed Conflict. The resolution clearly establishes that the rights and welfare of children everywhere are important issues that legitimately belong at the top of political agendas.

Olara Otunnu, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, has set up a programme of civilian Child Protection Advisors who work alongside the UN's "blue helmets" to ensure that children's rights are given priority in peacekeeping operations and post-conflict reconstruction programmes. (See *interview on page 2*)

However, the reach of child protection and human rights law is curtailed because international treaties typically bind States, not non-state actors such as armed rebel groups. There is a gap between commitment and compliance that must be bridged.

### **Action, not words**

The European Commission says concrete action is needed, not new international instruments. This includes stronger enforcement mechanisms, and programmes to prevent the development of conditions that are conducive to the abuse of children. The EU contributes to preventing the outbreak of armed conflict through development and rehabilitation assistance, conflict prevention measures, and human rights and democracy projects.

ECHO pays special attention to war-affected children and understands that reintegrating them into society is critical to stabilising a post-war crisis. For example, child soldiers in Sierra Leone are receiving psychosocial treatment, schools in emergency camps have been established in West Timor and ongoing health care programmes support traumatised children in Sudan. In addition to actions in the field, ECHO funds research and advocacy projects.

The Commission's Development and External Relations departments also fund projects that integrate the special needs of children either indirectly or as a cross-cutting issue, for example in health and education programmes. This commitment is strengthened under the Cotonou Agreement signed in June 2000 between the EU Member States and 77 ACP (Africa, Caribbean and Pacific) nations, which replaces the Lomé Convention.

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## What is happening to the children?

These comments were recorded in interviews with children at the Youth Activities Centre of El Bureij Refugee Camp, by *Antoine Vuillaume of Enfants Réfugiés du Monde, France, ECHO's partner in Gaza.*

*What does the Intifada mean to you?*

We have tasted suffering. Because he worked in Israel, my father has been unemployed for three months. My family does not have money to eat properly. Children are missing from my school. Ismael and Mohammed were killed. Mahmoud and Ahmad were injured. WALID I'NABAHIN, 14

*What do you hope to accomplish by throwing stones?*

I want to defend my country. The Israelis have the strength of their weapons, but we will continue until they leave our land. BRAHIM MANSOUR, 13

*Do you have hopes for the future?*

No. AHMAD AZAHRA, 9  
I dream of becoming an artist. I will paint what I have witnessed here. I want to take children to another environment for a while. WALID

The children are taking part in educational and cultural activities set up with ECHO support in 18 centres for women and young people in the Palestinian refugee camps. About 8,000 children aged six to twelve are involved. The initial €200,000 project, which ended in January 2001, is being extended to August 2001 with additional funding of €300,000. The centres are now managed by local communities.

## PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

The violent confrontations in the Palestinian territories have had a serious economic and social impact on civilians. In addition to numerous deaths and injuries, and damage to property, 125,000 Palestinians have lost their jobs because they are unable to travel to Israel. The UN Relief and Works Agency launched an appeal to tackle the urgent needs of refugees living in the affected areas. In December, the Commission announced that €14.6 million in emergency aid would be provided to help counter the growing risk of food insecurity and malnutrition among the most vulnerable groups. Funds were also earmarked for trauma counselling in 18 centres for women and children in Gaza.

## SUDAN

€15 million have been allocated for an intervention plan aimed at maintaining humanitarian aid deliveries to Sudan, as the country enters its eighteenth year of civil war. The main aim of the plan is to reduce mortality rates among the most vulnerable sections of the population and to promote, where possible, increased self reliance. The humanitarian actions supported by ECHO will focus on health, water/sanitation, food security, non-food relief and logistical support in the north and south of the country.

## RUSSIAN FEDERATION

The Commission approved funding amounting to €5.6m for immediate assistance to 125,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Chechnya and 80,000 in Ingushetia. The money has been allocated for food aid, winter clothing and medicines to refugees and vulnerable groups, including women and children.

## OTHER RECENT HUMANITARIAN AID DECISIONS (OF 2 MILLION OR MORE)

- Afghanistan: €3m – IDPs
- Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan: €4m – drought
- Algeria: €9m – Sahrawi refugees
- East Timor: €8.5 million – post-conflict support (health actions and reconstruction)
- Eritrea: €2m – IDPs and deportees
- Ethiopia: €5m – IDPs and deportees
- India: €4.65m – drought in Rajasthan and Gujarat, flooding in the East
- Indonesia: €2m – displaced people in the Moluccan islands
- Middle East (Gaza Strip, West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria): €8.5m – emergency relief and humanitarian assistance for refugees and other vulnerable groups
- Philippines: €2m – Internally displaced people (IDPs) in Mindanao
- Tajikistan, Armenia, Georgia: €4m – drought
- Zambia: €2m – Congolese and Angolan refugees

From now on, development cooperation will include actions aimed at protecting the rights of children; promoting the skills of young people; supporting community-based institutions to give them the opportunity to develop their potential; and reintegrating those enmeshed in post-conflict situations, through rehabilitation programmes.

Commission services are closely cooperating to prepare for the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children (UNGASS) to be held in New York in September 2001. The aim of this session is to review progress made since the 1990 World

Summit for Children and the adoption of the Convention of the Rights of the Child in 1989.

*"The Security Council ... strongly condemns the targeting of children in situations of armed conflict, including killing and maiming, sexual violence, abduction and forced displacement, recruitment and use of children in armed conflict in violation of international law, and attacks on ... schools and hospitals, and calls on all parties concerned to put an end to such practices."*  
UN Security Council Resolution 1261

## ▶ A new spirit of cooperation Commissioner Nielson visits Yugoslavia



*Poul Nielson visits an EU-funded metalwork business in Kosovo.*

Today, ECHO is working closely with the European Agency for Reconstruction, which is implementing EU assistance programmes in Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia, and with the UN's Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). An encouraging sign is that ECHO anticipates being able to reduce its programmes in the province substantially during 2001. In the meantime, the focus is on helping vulnerable groups to get through the harsh winter period. ECHO's field office in Kosovo, for example, is working on an emergency firewood and shelter material distribution plan for the province.

### Serbia and Montenegro

In Serbia and Montenegro, a particular effort has gone into helping social institutions which are going through a difficult transition process. Since the Kosovo war, both of these states have seen a considerable increase in humanitarian activities. Serbia alone hosts 680,000 displaced people from Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo, 10% of whom live in collective centres. There are also many orphans, and handicapped and elderly people, living in institutions that lack even the most basic of resources. The Roma are another group that is struggling to cope, often in very difficult conditions.

Prior to 5 October 2000 - the date of the "revolution" in Serbia - ECHO was the EU's main presence in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Its assistance was offered purely on humanitarian grounds.

Following the change of government, the EU launched an emergency assistance package for Serbia, in cooperation with the federal and Serbian authorities. This is currently being implemented by the European Agency for Reconstruction. In the meantime ECHO continues to provide complementary support for the most vulnerable groups in Yugoslavia, paving the way for local institutions to take over.

It is always easier to destroy than rebuild. The process of physical reconstruction in Yugoslavia will take some time and rebuilding trust between communities will doubtless take even longer. ECHO, however, is now able to envisage a time, in the not-too-distant future when its services as a humanitarian agency will no longer be required. This, at least, is a promising sign that things are moving in the right direction.

**The European Union's commitment to peace, democracy and stability in the Balkans was underlined when Poul Nielson, the European Commissioner for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid, visited the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) in December. Mr Nielson's visit came shortly after the change of government in Belgrade, and sent a strong signal of the EU's desire to strengthen cooperation with Yugoslavia and support post-conflict reconstruction and development in the wider region.**

The Commissioner held talks with political leaders and other key figures, including newly-elected President *Vojislav Kostunica* of Yugoslavia, President *Milo Djukanovic* of Montenegro and *Ibrahim Rugova*, President of Kosovo's Democratic League.

Mr Nielson also visited a number of ECHO-funded projects in Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo. This gave him an opportunity to meet with local people and learn more about their efforts to rebuild their lives and communities.

Since the end of the Cold War, the former Yugoslavia has endured a series of conflicts - in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and, most recently, Kosovo. ECHO has been active throughout this period, working to relieve the misery of all those caught in the crossfire. Over the last decade, it has provided almost €2 billion in humanitarian assistance to the region.

The good news is that ECHO has been able to wind down its operations in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina now that the humanitarian crises are over. Although we are no longer in the emergency phase in Kosovo, Serbia and Montenegro, there are still significant humanitarian needs to be met among the most vulnerable sections of the population. ECHO is involved in this work, and also in helping to ensure a smooth transition from emergency assistance to longer term EU reconstruction and development programmes.

### Kosovo

During the 1999 crisis, ECHO was at the forefront of the relief effort, helping to provide refugees, displaced people and other vulnerable groups with shelter, food and medicines.

In 1999, €378 million were allocated to the areas affected by the crisis, of which €112 million were spent on projects in Kosovo itself. ECHO also financed operations in Albania, Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia all of which played host to large numbers of displaced Kosovars.

EU humanitarian aid for the Balkans since 1999\* (in €m)

	Kosovo crisis 1999	Former Yugoslavia 1999	Balkans 2000	Total 1999/2000	2001
Kosovo	111.70		28.84	140.54	5.20
Serbia	70.03	5.10	50.45	125.58	7.60
Montenegro	17.57	1.00	9.19	27.76	2.15
FYROM	39.81		5.35	45.16	0.75
Albania	97.07		3.40	100.47	1.60
Bosnia-Herzegovina	2.50	56.40	0.40	59.30	
Croatia		6.50		6.50	
Regional	39.32		1.07	40.39	
<b>Total</b>	<b>378.00</b>	<b>69.00</b>	<b>98.70</b>	<b>545.70</b>	

\* assistance provided by individual EU member states not included