



**Appearance of Minister of State for Trade and Development, Mr.
Joe Costello, T.D. before the European Parliament Committee on
Development (DEVE),**

Tuesday 22 January 2013

Address on Ireland's Humanitarian Presidency Priorities

Madame la Présidente, Honourable Members, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues,

I am delighted to have this opportunity to appear before you today in order to share with you Ireland's priorities for the next six months under our Presidency work programme for humanitarian affairs.

Please allow me to state, at the outset, Ireland's commitment to working closely with the European Parliament on this, and other portfolios. We look forward to deepening the already positive working relationship between the Parliament, Council, and Commission over the next six months.

As you know, Ireland has long prioritised our programme of humanitarian assistance as a bilateral donor - a programme which we are proud to maintain, notwithstanding the economic challenges with which we, along with fellow Member States, are currently faced.

As a country, we are equally proud of the leadership and generosity of the European Union – both the European Commission (through DG ECHO) as well as Member States – in providing ongoing life-saving humanitarian assistance to those communities, countries and regions around the world who are most in need.

The aim of the Union's humanitarian action is to provide assistance, relief and protection for people who are victims of natural or man-made disasters in third countries. Today, the European Union as a whole is the world's biggest humanitarian aid donor and a key international actor in providing disaster relief. Taken together, the Union and its Member States represent some 45% of the global funding for humanitarian aid.

The EU's humanitarian aid is provided primarily through the funding of partner organisations. Currently, these include some 200 partners comprising the UN,

Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement, as well as NGOs and some Member States' specialised agencies. In 2011, humanitarian aid provided by the Commission totalled €1.15 billion and reached some 117 million people in 91 countries. An estimated 42 % of this funding was spent on 'protracted crises'. In the last five years an average of €1 billion has been provided annually, helping nearly 150 million of the world's most vulnerable people.

The Union's humanitarian action is strongly supported by its citizens. A recent Eurobarometer survey shows that public support for EU humanitarian aid has increased again, with 88% Europeans supporting the EU's funding of humanitarian aid in spite of the economic crisis and associated pressure on public finances.

It is clear that much good work is being done and many lives are being saved. Nonetheless, we must always challenge ourselves to achieve more; to deliver our assistance more effectively; to ensure that our assistance is delivered in a targeted and principled manner; and to ensure that we are fully accountable, both to our own citizens and to the vulnerable populations we seek to serve.

It is in this context that I would like to present to you today the main elements of Ireland's Presidency Work Programme. I would also like to take some time to touch upon some of the most pressing humanitarian challenges with which we are currently faced, including Mali, Syria and its neighbouring countries and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Work Programme

In introducing Ireland's Presidency Work Programme, I would like first to congratulate the previous Presidency Trio (*Poland, Denmark, Cyprus*) for their significant achievements. We will seek, over the next six months, to build upon the solid foundations that they have laid and to bring forward the ongoing dossiers with which they have so ably dealt, while at the same time working with the incoming Trio (which also includes Lithuania and Greece) to create further positive momentum.

In particular, the Irish Presidency will aim to deliver on four key priority action areas:

1. Enhanced coordination

Our first major priority will be to ensure that EU humanitarian assistance is delivered in as effective and timely manner as possible.

Ireland will support efforts to enhance coordination between the EU and its Members States in relation to the EU's ongoing humanitarian response to complex, man-made emergencies and to natural disasters worldwide.

Whilst our attention is, inevitably and justifiably, drawn to crisis situations which command international media attention, the Irish Presidency will seek to ensure a clear and continued focus on the world's forgotten, complex and protracted emergencies.

We will seek to step up efforts to improve the effectiveness and coherence of the EU's humanitarian assistance. This will involve coordination and information sharing; operational discussions; interaction with relevant external humanitarian actors; and a coordinated response, where appropriate, to other key humanitarian decision-making fora.

We will support the ongoing efforts at UN level under the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, Valerie Amos, to strengthen and reform the

overall international humanitarian relief effort through the Transformative Agenda.

2. Linking Relief, Recovery and Development

A second major priority of the Irish Presidency will be to promote better linkages between humanitarian relief, recovery and longer-term development. I know that this is also an area of work which has long been championed by members of this committee.

The chronic nature of poverty and vulnerability, and the increasing frequency and severity of natural and man-made disasters in recent years, points to the need to ensure a coherent, joined-up approach on the part of both humanitarian and development actors.

We believe that it is essential to forge stronger links between the EU's development and humanitarian policies and programmes, notably through an increased focus on building the resilience of vulnerable individuals, families, communities, nations and regions.

An important element will be actions to anticipate, prevent, and prepare for disasters that will enhance the protection of individuals and their communities from the effects of natural and man-made disasters, and will improve the resilience of countries and regions to the increasing threats of such events.

Much work has already taken place on resilience, including the establishment last year of the AGIR initiative to address, in a durable and sustainable manner, the recurrent food crises in the Sahel.

Similarly, the SHARE initiative for the Horn of Africa aims to improve the link between humanitarian and development actions, and ensure long-term engagement to enhance resilience in that region.

Ireland will draw on lessons learned from these initiatives, as well as from other lessons from the field, to explore the most effective practical application of linking relief, recovery and development, and to showcase examples of best practice in the field. We would hope that our Presidency will develop Council Conclusions which will offer tangible political expression to the EU's efforts to promote resilience, as well as offering guidance for changes that may be needed in order to put this into effect.

3. EU Aid Volunteers Initiative

A third major dossier for our Presidency will, I know, be of particular interest to the European Parliament. During the course of our Presidency, we will seek to make progress on the legislative proposal to establish the EU Aid Volunteers initiative.

We believe that this initiative will provide an invaluable opportunity for enhanced citizen participation in the overall EU humanitarian effort. A well functioning, well trained Corps of professional Humanitarian Aid Volunteers should be seen as a concrete expression of the EU's solidarity with those in need.

We greatly look forward to working with the European Parliament, and in particular with Madame Michèle Striffler (*Standing Rapporteur for this proposal*) and her Shadow Rapporteurs, in order to facilitate discussions between the Council, Commission and European Parliament on this important initiative.

Ireland considers this legislation to be a key priority within the sphere of humanitarian aid, and we will do our utmost to work closely with the Parliament, and to ensure that members are fully informed on progress. We count on your support in successfully advancing the establishment of a demand-driven EU Aid Volunteers initiative which adds value to the overall EU humanitarian effort, is cost effective, and which responds to humanitarian need.

4. A principled approach to humanitarian action

Finally, Ireland will champion the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. We will work to be proactive and principled, but also flexible and pragmatic, in our engagement with other actors so as to ensure that the voice of the EU, its Member States, and wider humanitarian community is heard.

We very much recognise the importance of protecting the so-called 'humanitarian space' and know from experience that those agencies and actors which are perceived as impartial to a conflict are invariably best placed to deliver aid to those who need it most.

Emergency humanitarian assistance is not and must not be considered to form part of the crisis management toolbox; the provision of humanitarian assistance must continue to be based on needs alone.

The European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid provides a robust set of humanitarian commitments which enshrine these fundamental principles and which are intended to ensure an appropriate, principled and effective aid response by donors across the European Union.

Under our Presidency, Ireland will promote the operational implementation of these fundamental principles guiding our work through the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid.

Crisis situations

Before turning to any questions you may have, as an example of the type of operational activity we are likely to be supporting over the next six months, I would like to briefly touch upon three current crises situations; namely, Mali, Syria and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Mali

Mali has been one of the countries worst affected by the wider humanitarian crisis in the Sahel. The coup d'état in March 2012 and subsequent security crisis in the northern part of the country only served to worsen an already dire situation. In 2012 aid agencies reported that almost half a million Malians were internally displaced or had sought refuge in neighbouring countries and that five million people in Mali faced food crisis, drought and insecurity.

Following the French military intervention at the request of the Bamako authorities the situation in Mali was discussed in detail at an extraordinary meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council, in Brussels on 17 January. At this meeting the EU expressed its preparedness to step up support to the efforts being made by humanitarian organisations to assist the people in need in Mali and in neighbouring countries.

The precise impact of recent developments on the humanitarian situation are unclear but population displacements have been reported by humanitarian agencies on the ground, adding to the first wave of displacements from the region that started in April 2012.

The EU has taken a proactive role in responding to the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Mali. Commissioner Georgieva visited Bamako on 8 December and emphasized the necessity to increase humanitarian capacity and coordination mechanisms to address persistent needs. Following her visit the Commission increased its humanitarian response to the crisis in Mali by €20 which brought the EU's humanitarian support to Mali in 2012 to €101 million.

This funding will help to provide food assistance, water and sanitation, shelter, health and protection to those affected by the conflict both within Mali, north and south, and to refugees in neighbouring countries.

The Irish Presidency will continue to encourage Member States to support the growing needs of the Malian population with a particular focus on displaced populations. It is also important that the EU should call on all parties to the conflict to respect the safety of civilians, to leave medical and educational facilities untouched, and not to impede the delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable populations. We call on all parties to respect and uphold International Humanitarian Law.

Syria

We are all familiar with the appalling suffering that has been visited on the Syrian people since the uprising began in March 2011. However, I think the facts bear repeating:

- An estimated 60,000 people have been killed;
- An estimated 2.5 million people inside Syria require immediate humanitarian assistance;
- Approximately 1.2 million people inside Syria have been internally displaced;
- Registered refugees from Syria in the region now exceed half a million, with many more awaiting registration.

In August last year, when the scale of the crisis was already staggering but not yet at its current level, I visited Jordan, where I witnessed firsthand the huge strain that accommodating such a significant refugee population is placing on host countries, both in relation to refugee camps and in host communities. In this context, the commendable and extensive efforts of Syria's neighbours to welcome refugees and respond proactively and generously to their needs cannot be overstated.

It is clear, however, that the situation – both for the population within Syria and for host countries – has long been untenable and is reaching breaking point.

It is essential therefore that the EU, as a leader within the international community, continues to strive to respond to the overwhelming humanitarian needs of the populations affected by the conflict, whilst working simultaneously to support efforts to find a sustainable political solution.

The EU has responded generously to the crisis in terms of financial assistance – having allocated over 422 million Euros in donations and in-kind assistance since the start of the unrest.

We have consistently called upon all parties to facilitate humanitarian access and aid delivery to the people in need, to ensure the neutrality of humanitarian aid and to abide by International Humanitarian Law.

The EU has also reiterated its demand for the specific protection provided to medical personnel and facilities and for the safe passage and protection of

civilians, especially of women and children who have been displaced as a result of the violence.

During our presidency, we aim to ensure that the EU will continue to address the situation in Syria as a matter of priority. The EU must further enhance our response to urgent needs, focusing on lifesaving humanitarian operations and, to the greatest extent possible, increase our efforts to meet urgent humanitarian needs through increased humanitarian contributions, in coordination with the UN and in line with humanitarian principles.

Democratic Republic of Congo

I would also like to draw your attention to the situation in the DRC which, while currently the focus of some media attention in the aftermath of the M23 rebel group incursion into Goma, remains one of the world's most enduring and complex, yet all too often forgotten, humanitarian crises.

DRC has seen more than 5 million people die since 1998, with the conflict being arguably the world's most deadly crisis since the Second World War.

At the start of 2012, there were an estimated 1.6 million internally displaced persons in DRC; following the recent upsurge in violence, it is now estimated

that 2.4 million persons are displaced, with almost half a million additional refugees in neighbouring countries.

The complexity of the crisis in DRC requires both immediate assistance strategies to provide life saving humanitarian assistance and longer term strategies aimed at building lasting capacity and increasing the ability of communities to withstand future shocks.

Equally, as acknowledged in the Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions of 10 December, in order to put an end to the ongoing suffering of the Congolese people, it is vital that we endeavour to find a lasting solution which addresses the underlying causes of this conflict. We must remain committed to this and other forgotten crises.

In closing, I would like to again underline Ireland's commitment to progressing the humanitarian assistance agenda, and our eagerness to work closely with the European Parliament, as well as other Institutions, in order to achieve the priorities I have outlined today.

I remain at your disposal for any questions you may have and I thank you for your kind attention.

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