



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Civil protection and humanitarian aid facing disasters and crises together

Reinforcing cooperation on the field for a more efficient international response capacity

Rome, 10-11 November 2011

Concept note

The year 2011 marks the 10th anniversary since the establishment of the European Civil Protection Mechanism. Over the last decade the cooperation in civil protection between States has sharply increased and a common language has progressively been developed. At European level the Mechanism played a crucial role in this respect proving to be an efficient tool in enhancing coordination among Participating States aiming at facing the growing number of devastating disasters at national, European and international level, of both natural and man-made origin.

While the Mechanism was created with the main objective of facilitating cooperation among the Participating States for emergencies internal to Europe, its operations have developed over time up to providing a relevant contribution in major humanitarian emergencies all over the world. Among the most widely known and significant response operations carried out are those following the tsunami that hit South East Asia at the end of 2004, the recent Haiti earthquake and the Pakistan floods as well as the Libya/Tunisia mass migration phenomena. Those operations represented a quantum leap in demonstrating how civil protection and humanitarian aid can join their efforts and efficiently allocate resources in massive emergencies outside the European Union.

Furthermore, in emergencies taking place in developing countries cooperation among several actors aimed at achieving the best synergy in providing assistance to those most in need has been implemented. The coordination role of the United Nations during these emergencies is pivotal and the European Union has actively worked since the creation of the Mechanism to integrate its working methods and activities within the broader international disaster response. Following the setting up of a constantly evolving dialogue between the United Nations and the European Union, since 2003, a more integrated response to disasters and crises occurring all over the world has been built, but many issues still need to be clarified given the number of different actors working in the same emergency environment.

At EU level, the trend towards a progressive joining of efforts between civil protection and humanitarian aid, has brought about the recent merging of the two sectors under the same European Commission *DG Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection - ECHO*.

In the meantime, from a legal point of view, the Treaty of Lisbon has acknowledged the increased significance and value of civil protection, by devoting a whole article (Art. 196 TFUE) to the topic. That norm introduces the competence of the European Union in supporting and complementing the action of Member States and promoting consistency in international civil protection work and lays the foundation of the upcoming Mechanism reform.

The growing number of disasters all over the world and the challenge posed by climate change to the whole international community represent driving forces in strengthening disaster response at international level, namely to increase the potential and capacity to assist people and governments hit by disasters. This can be done through the development of deeper ties between the actors involved on the field. In fact, the Red Cross Movement, as well as NGOs and the military forces represent together with national civil protection and humanitarian authorities, the EU and UN agencies different components of a multi-faceted disaster response capacity that aims at reacting promptly and efficiently worldwide by optimizing all available means and streamlining humanitarian aid towards the most urgent humanitarian needs.

The issue of how to advance cooperation between civil protection and humanitarian aid has been widely debated in the last decade and several milestones have been established such as the “Oslo guidelines” and the “European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid”. Several ad-hoc solutions adopted in different contexts and times have proved to be effective when the international community had to cope with major disasters, but a lot still remains to be done toward the definition of an agreed approach, particularly when the two entities have to work side by side on the field.

Marking the 10th anniversary of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, this Conference will provide the opportunity to take advantage of the progress made at EU level in developing civil protection cooperation, in close partnership and cooperation with humanitarian aid actors and to consider ways to further reinforce the cooperation on the field for a more efficient international response capacity.

This conference will represent a perfect occasion of exchange, impulse and constructive debate on these objectives, developing further on the results of the 2008 Meeting in Geneva on the “Role of Modern Civil Protection”.

The conference will focus its attention on four main issues:

Coordination on the field

Recent international disasters and major crisis show that the number of actors on the field has considerably increased: civil protection authorities, military and private companies have joined the traditional humanitarian community. For this reason the issue of coordination is becoming more and more critical in order to avoid gaps and duplications. In this situation the overall coordination role of the United Nations is essential to achieve the full effectiveness of the response.

What is the level of cooperation so far? How can mistakes, gaps and duplications be avoided and what are the possible steps forward needed to enhance the level of response of the international community?

Civil-military cooperation/coordination

Civil-military cooperation/coordination is still a serious concern for the whole Humanitarian Community; however, the use of military forces in disasters is becoming ever more frequent. In recent years Civil Protections have offered possible examples of good practice in cooperation between the civilian and military components.

To what extent is such an interaction capable of facilitating the effort in providing relief, how can those synergies be optimized in compliance with the principles of international humanitarian law, MCDA and Oslo guidelines?

International Disaster Response Law frame of reference

The increasing number of international operations following disasters causes a growing number of legal problems related to the response actions. Working without a clear legal framework in a complex environment is becoming more and more difficult; for this reason the International Disaster Response Law (IDRL) is becoming a key priority for the International Community.

Is the current legal framework sufficiently developed? Do we still have gaps in the overall picture of the rules regarding the response to a crisis?

The role of Non Governmental Organizations and volunteers

Starting from different perspectives Civil protection and Humanitarian NGOs are today working together toward the same objective, aiming at achieving more effective results. Volunteers are also playing a major role both in the humanitarian and civil protection sector and in each of these fields many different good practices have been established worldwide. Is it time to mutually contaminate their way of thinking and working methodologies? How can their actions be made more effective? What role can they play in current and future major international disasters?