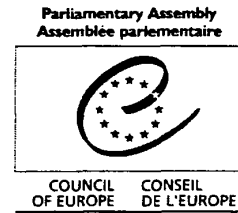


Parliamentary Assembly Assemblée parlementaire



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Europe and the Tsunami Disaster

Report
Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee
Rapporteur : Mrs Patrizia Paoletti Tangheroni, Italy, Group of the European People's Party

Summary

The Parliamentary Assembly would like first of all express its intense sorrow and its deep sympathy with the families of victims.

While welcoming the generosity expressed by the international community, the Assembly underlines that these promises and commitments should not be made to the detriment of the victims of other disasters.

The Assembly recommends that the governments of the member states honor the commitments entered into and take the necessary measures in order to especially ensure the protection of the children and of vulnerable groups.

The Assembly calls on the governments of the countries affected by the disaster to avoid any religious or ethnic discrimination during the distribution of the aid.

In conclusion, the Assembly proposes to take stock, within one year, of the real aid situation provided by the international community.

I. Draft resolution

1. The Parliamentary Assembly was deeply shocked by the disaster which struck South-East Asia and the countries surrounding the Indian Ocean and which claimed 280 000 lives and displaced 5 million individuals.
2. The Assembly would like first of all to express its immense sorrow at these tragic deaths and its deep sympathy with the families and close relatives of the victims in both the countries affected by the earthquake and the rest of the world and in particular in European countries.
3. The Assembly welcomes the generosity with which the international community has reacted. States and international institutions have pledged large sums of money and agreed to wipe out or to place moratoria on debts. Thousands of enterprises and millions of individuals worldwide have donated. In this connection, the Assembly stresses the need for the utmost transparency during the dispatch of these funds.
4. In view of the importance that pledges be fully met through actual disbursement – and in the awareness that such has not always been the case after similar disasters in the past – the Assembly resolves closely to monitor that the pledges are scrupulously honoured, without jeopardizing aid allocated to other areas.
5. The same holds for the timing and co-ordination of the assistance – from immediate relief to medium and long-term support – to the remote regions. The Assembly in this context welcomes the offer of the European Union, the United States and Japan to assist the region in installing a state-of-the-art tsunami early warning system.
6. The Assembly welcomes the decision taken during the Donors' Conference to designate the United Nations as co-ordinator of humanitarian aid. It is important that the United Nations take up this challenge by co-ordinating activities on the ground, assessing priorities and delegating responsibilities to the best-placed specialised agencies, as well as to the NGOs and in close co-operation with the local authorities.
7. Most of the infrastructures, transport links and energy sources have been destroyed. This has left the majority of victims without any means of subsistence, housing or livelihood.
8. Furthermore, the damage caused by the tsunami, which has also had an impact on marine fauna and flora, including the mangroves and coral reefs, is having an enormous effect on local populations, whose resources stem mainly from fishing and tourism.
9. The ensuing flooding has given rise to risks of such diseases as cholera, yellow fever and malaria. The poor health conditions and the lack of drinking water contributed to the risk of epidemics. It is therefore urgent to install an epidemiological monitoring system, particularly in the more remote areas.
10. Under these circumstances, it is essential that the United Nations make a co-ordinated vaccination and health campaign geared to preventing cholera and the other waterborne diseases.
11. In addition, the protection of the children who have been orphaned by the disaster must be a major priority for the humanitarian agencies.
12. According to UNICEF estimates, the number of children affected by the disaster amounts to around 1 500 000. The international community must act to prevent these children from becoming targets for trafficking, physical violence, sexual exploitation or recruitment by sects. In this context, the Assembly backs UNICEF's proposal to identify all the children as quickly as possible and implement measures to prevent trafficking in children.
13. The Assembly considers that child sponsorship must be promoted and established in order to protect the children from other traumas. In accordance with Recommendation 1443 (2000), the Assembly reiterates that international adoption must be used only as the very last resort.
14. The Assembly supports the appeal launched by the United Nations Donors' Conference for the donation pledges to be honoured and it stresses at the same time that this should not lead us to forget the victims of other crises which affected or still affect different regions of the world.

15. It must be recalled that 1.2 billion people worldwide live in poverty and that almost 1 billion, including over 150 million children under the age of five, suffer from malnutrition. In this context, the Assembly recalls the need for Council of Europe member states and all the donor countries of the international community to endeavour to achieve the objective set in Monterrey to earmark 0.7% of their GDP for public development aid.

16. Consequently, the Parliamentary Assembly requests that the member States of the Council of Europe, as regards :

i. Pledges and assistance

- a. honour the commitments entered into in connection with pledged funds and assistance to the states struck by the tsunami, without prejudicing aid allocated to other areas;
- b. support the activities of the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs in its co-ordinating role;
- c. facilitate the granting of the funds needed for reconstruction and rehabilitation, including the use of micro-loans;
- d. implement the decision taken during the Conference of Kobe ;
- e. establish an early warning and prevention system to detect earthquakes and tidal waves in co-operation with the Council of Europe's Major Hazards Partial Agreement (EUR-OPA) and concurrently provide education and training for the populations concerned;
- f. support the proposed creation of a European Civil Intervention Force;

ii. Protection of children and vulnerable groups

- a. provide psychological support for children and orphans;
- b. as far as possible place children in homes in their own community or extended family and to undertake the necessary measures to, as quickly as possible, establish a regular check on their placements and life style;
- c. ensure that displaced children are registered as quickly as possible and prohibit minors from leaving the country with an unauthorized person;
- d. implement the requisite measures for sponsoring orphans;
- e. take the necessary measures for the protection of the elderly and the disabled;

iii. Health

- a. guarantee provision of medicines and medical care;
- b. introduce an epidemiological warning system;

iv. Environment and Local Affairs

- a. take the necessary measures to rebuild and rehabilitate housing and natural ecosystems;
- b. encourage twinning arrangements with the stricken regions and towns in close co-operation with Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;

17. The Parliamentary Assembly invites the governments of the countries affected by the disaster to:

- i. facilitate the humanitarian organisations' aid distribution work;
- ii. take the requisite steps to guarantee access by the needy to aid, irrespective of the victims' political conviction or ethnic or religious affiliation;

iii. take the requisite steps to facilitate the operations and activities of the humanitarian agencies.

18. The Parliamentary Assembly proposes to take stock, within one year, of the real aid situation given by Europe, the United Nations and its specialized agencies as well as of the needs and to examine, in this context, the response provided and the responsibility taken on by Europe in the face of humanitarian disasters within and outside the borders of Europe.

II. Explanatory memorandum by Mrs Patrizia Paoletti Tangheroni

1. At its meeting in Vienna on 10 January 2005 the Bureau of the Assembly decided to propose that the Parliamentary Assembly hold a debate under urgent procedure on Europe and the tsunami disaster, and to refer this matter to the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee for report and to the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population and the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs for opinion.
2. I would like first of all to express my intense sorrow at these tragic deaths and my deep sympathy with the families and friends of victims.
3. The Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee welcomes this decision because it feels that the Parliamentary Assembly has a very important role to play in expressing European solidarity in the face of this disaster and the support which it can provide to victims by ensuring that the issue remains at the top of the agenda.
4. On 26 December 2004 the whole world was shocked by the catastrophe which struck south-east Asia and the countries surrounding the Indian Ocean. The earthquake, of a magnitude of 9 on the Richter scale, the most violent for 40 years, caused a huge tsunami which claimed 280 000 lives and left over 500 000 seriously injured and over 5 million victims in all. A large number of countries were affected, extending from Asia to Africa.
5. The ensuing flooding has given rise to risks of such diseases as cholera, yellow fever and malaria. A great many individuals have contracted pneumonia after being trapped for long periods in cold water. Furthermore, the poor health conditions and the lack of drinking water is increasing the risk of epidemics. Health conditions in the camps are alarming. The WHO has said that over 5 million individuals are deprived of drinking water and of most basic health and medical services, and experts fear that epidemics caused by drinking contaminated water will claim even more victims than the tsunami itself. Unfortunately, the situation is still critical in the more remote areas.
6. Most of the infrastructures, transport links and energy sources have been destroyed.
7. The rapporteur welcomes the decision taken in Djakarta to mandate the United Nations to co-ordinate humanitarian assistance, the Paris Club's decision to grant a moratorium on the affected countries' repayment of their external debt, as well as the European Union's plan to pay an additional € 450 million in humanitarian aid, including € 350 million to be earmarked for longer-term rebuilding needs, in order to repair destroyed infrastructures and enable coastal populations to get back to earning their living. With this in mind, particular attention should be paid to micro-loan systems, which could help such populations resume their normal lives.
8. This disaster has affected the most vulnerable segments of populations and individuals, especially children, who account for virtually 1/3 of all victims. Particular attention should also be paid to pregnant women.
9. In this connection, the NGOs have been submerged with phone calls from parents hoping to foster an orphan. However, adoptions must be well prepared, and in the children's interests the first step must be to attempt to have them taken in by their extended family, or failing that, by their own community. It should be stressed that Islam has no tradition of adoption, which Muslims reject in favour of the "kafala" tradition. In most of the countries hit by the tsunami, family bonds are very strong, and the extended family should provide for the orphaned children.
10. Where a child has lost everything, we should avoid further traumatising him/her by imposing a new country, different customs and an unfamiliar language. Moreover, in other circumstances the Parliamentary Assembly has come down clearly in favour of prioritising national adoption where necessary so that the children are not cut off from their socio-cultural environment, with international adoption being used as a last resort (see Recommendation 1443 (2000)).
11. The Rapporteur would like therefore to stress that international adoption should be the final option, and must not be seen as a humanitarian act. Adopting on a generous impulse forces an intolerable debt of gratitude on the child.

12. While the media have clearly shown that the local populations depend overwhelmingly on western tourism in order to survive, they have barely touched on the issue of sex tourism. And yet it is obvious that the current distress of the populations and the loss of all their belongings to the tsunami are liable to reactivate sexual exploitation, particularly that of children. The Parliamentary Assembly must appeal to European States to remain vigilant and reiterate the various measures on which the international community has agreed in order to combat this scourge.

13. Child sponsorship represents therefore the optimum solution, as it also helps to prevent trafficking in children and sex tourism and to eradicate the sexual exploitation of children. In this connection, specific measures are urgently needed to increase security and surveillance in the refugee camps.

14. The rapporteur was greatly impressed by the enormous solidarity and generosity shown, as well as by the speed of the reaction by the competent international organisations and NGOs.

15. A large number of local and international NGOs are now at work on the ground. Even though the enthusiastic solidarity and the need to help expressed by populations that were not affected by the disaster is understandable, the sheer dimensions of the problem and the need for optimum efficiency mean that a certain degree of competence and professionalism on the part of those involved *in situ* is absolutely vital. Donations and other forms of aid are also needed in order to encourage the work of local NGOs and local INGO branches familiar with local cultures and customs. Transparent use of the enormous funds to be earmarked for dealing with the aftermath of the tsunami is absolutely necessary, and a minimum level of administrative procedure is needed, while avoiding the pitfalls of bureaucracy, in order to guarantee the proper use of the money.

16. In 2001, "International Year of Volunteers", the Assembly took note of the positive aspects of voluntary work, and its democratic, humanitarian and educational value (cf. Recommendation 1496 (2001)). Among other measures, it recommended setting up a European Observatory and registry of volunteer work. It might be useful to emphasise such action at a time when Europe is wondering about possibilities for co-ordinating its humanitarian intervention forces.

17. Nevertheless, while this disaster has promoted an unprecedented surge of generosity and the greatest ever mobilisation of humanitarian forces, the governments and the entire international community must ensure that this enthusiasm does not run out of steam. At the Donors' Conference in Geneva, the Secretary General of the United Nations pointed out that total donations of US\$ 977 000 000 were needed in order to cope with the disaster, and that this level of donations had to be respected. I might mention in this context that, for example, only 2% of the donations pledged for assisting the victims of the earthquake in the city of Bam in Iran have so far been respected.

18. We must therefore urgently consider how to assist and rebuild these stricken regions, establish a long-term strategy and ensure that the States honour their commitments. I would refer here to the contribution by the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, which is dealing with this issue.

19. Furthermore, we all agree that the reason why this disaster has mobilised the whole world is not only because of its scale but also because many westerners had been on holiday in the region. The proof is that Somalia was also affected by the aftermath of the tsunami, albeit to a lesser extent, but the media disregarded the problem there because no nationals of wealthy countries had been on the spot.

20. The rapporteur thinks we must avoid selective charity and break our silence on the other humanitarian catastrophes which are unfolding before our indifferent eyes. I would therefore urge the Parliamentary Assembly to agree to include an agenda item, at one of its annual sessions, on a yearly report on humanitarian emergencies worldwide.

Reporting committee : Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee

Referred for urgent debate to the Committee: Reference N° 3050 du 24 January 2005

Draft resolution unanimously adopted on: 25 January 2005

Members of the Committee: **Mr. Marcel Glesener** (Chair), **Mrs Christine McCafferty** (1st Vice-Chair), **Mrs Patrizia Paoletti Tangheroni** (2nd Vice-Chair), **Mrs Helena Bargholtz** (3rd Vice-Chair), Mrs Birgitta Ahlqvist, Mr. Giuseppe Arzilli, **Mrs Maria Eduarda Azevedo**, MM. Miroslav Benes, **Andris Berzinš**, Jaime Blanco, Bozidar Bojovic, Mrs Marida Bolognesi, MM. Dumitru Braghis, Christian Brunhart, **Saulius Bucevicus**, Gheorghe Buzatu (Alternate : **Mr. Daniel Ionescu**), **Igor Chernyshenko**, Doros Christodoulides (Alternate : **Mr. Marinos Sizopoulos**), Mrs Minodora Cliveti, MM. Luis Eduardo Cortès, **Thomas Cox**, András Csáky, Imre Czinege, **Jordi Daban Alsina**, Mrs Helen D'Amato, **MM. Dirk Dees**, Karl Donabauer, **Ioannis Dragakassis**, Mehdi Eker, Claude Evin, **Paul Flynn**, Jean-Marie Geveaux, Igor Glukhovskiy (Alternate: **Mrs Svetlana Smirnova**), Ali Riza Gülççek, **Mykhailo Hladiy**, **Bent Høie**, Mrs Sinikka Hurskainen, **Mrs Halide Incekara**, MM. Denis Jacquat, **Zbigniew Jacyna-Onyszkiewicz**, Ramon Jaúregui, **Orest Klympush**, **Baroness Knight of Collingtree**, MM. Shavarsh Kocharyan, Ms Katerina Konečná, **Mrs Marie-José Laloy**, MM. Slaven Letica, Gadzhzy Makhachev (Alternate : **M. Yuri Kovalev**), **Tomasz Markowski**, **Bernard Marquet**, **Paddy McHugh**, Christian Menard, **Mrs Liljana Miličević**, MM. Nikolay Mladenov, Philippe Monfils, **Mrs Nino Nakashidzé**, **Mrs Vera Oskina**, MM. Marek Pol, Virgil Popa, Troels Lund Poulsen, Fiorello Provera, **Anatoliy Pysarenko**, Mrs Valentina Radulović-Šćepanović, Mr. Helmut Rauber, Mrs Mailis Reps, MM. Walter Riestler, Enrico Rizzi, Mrs Maria de Belém Roseira, MM. **Walter Schmied**, Samad Seyidov, Mrs Naira Shakhtakhtinskaya, Mr. Ossur Skarphéðinsson, Mrs Darinka Stantcheva, Mrs Rita Streb-Hesse, Mr. Konstantinos Tassoulas, **Mrs Jozephina Topalli**, **Mr. Milan Urbáni**, **Mrs Ruth-Gaby Vermot-Mangold**, MM. Bart Van Winsen (Alternate : **Mr. Tiny Kox**), Mrs Verena Wohlleben (Alternate : **Mr. Wolfgang Wodarg**), Mrs Gisela Wurm, **Mr. Andrej Zernovski**, Mrs Barbara Zgajner-Tavš.

NB: The names of those members present at the meeting are printed in bold

Head of Secretariat: Mr Géza Mezei

Secretaries of the Committee: Mrs Agnès Nollinger, Mrs Christine Meunier, Mrs Dana Karanjac

