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Press Release

Extraordinary Council – General Affairs and External Relations – held on 7 January 2005

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Policy area : [General Affairs and External Relations](#)
Event : [Extraordinary meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council](#)

On 7 January 2005, the General Affairs and External Relations Council met in an extraordinary session to discuss the consequences of the undersea earthquake in Asia and the Indian Ocean. The Foreign Ministers, Ministers for Development Cooperation and Health Ministers of the European Union all attended the meeting.

Under the chairmanship of Luxembourg's Foreign Minister, Jean Asselborn, the Council looked at the next steps to be taken by the European Union in order to assist the stricken populations.

The Ministers touched not only on the question of immediate humanitarian assistance in order to avoid epidemics, but also longer-term challenges, whether concerning rehabilitation or reconstruction of the regions affected.

The Council heard from the representatives of the EU Presidency who attended at the scene of the disaster. The Minister for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs, Jean-Louis Schiltz, and the European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, Louis Michel, presented a report on the coordination of efforts of the EU and the Member States. The Council also noted the efforts made by the various agencies of the UN.

The Luxembourg Presidency stressed the importance of ensuring an efficient transition from the emergency phase of humanitarian assistance to the intermediate rehabilitation phase and then on to the longer-term phase of reconstruction.

With regard to short-term action to be taken, the Member States agreed to act in support of the World Health Organization in order to avert the risks of epidemics and in order to restore sanitation infrastructures by sending equipment and medical teams. In this connection, Jean Asselborn stressed that "solidarity in the face of this disaster must not distract from the general problem of development and the Objectives of the Millennium", in particular with regard to the African continent.

The Minister recalled that, until now "combined public assistance from the European Union and the Member States amounts to one and a half billion euro," adding that "it is on this basis that the European Union and the Member States will adopt their stance on 11 January at the donor conference in Geneva."

Luxembourg's Health Minister, Mars de Bartolomeo, invited the Member States and their partners to redouble their efforts under the aegis of the World Health Organization in order to avert the risk of epidemics and in order to restore sanitation infrastructures by sending equipment and medical teams.

With regard to longer-term action to be taken, assistance should enable the populations to be less vulnerable and enable governments to be better placed to confront possible future natural disasters.

The Council invited the Commission to submit proposals for a strategy for strengthening preventive measures, early-warning systems and disaster preparation.

The Member States will examine other supporting measures, in particular commercial support and bilateral partnerships. The Ministers encouraged the competent authorities to set up twinning arrangements with the stricken regions and towns.


The Ministers noted the intention of the Member States to adjust debt servicing of the affected countries. The economic consequences of the disaster will be on the agenda of the next meeting of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council to be held on 18 January 2005.

With a view to strengthening protection of EU citizens, the Ministers declared themselves in favour of yet closer consular cooperation between the Member States.

At the General Affairs and External Relations Council meeting to be held on 31 January, the Foreign Ministers will review the current status of planned measures with a view to formulating an operational EU action plan.

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