

EUROPEAN COMMISSION



Humanitarian Aid

Commission provides a €3 million initial aid package and launches an EU-coordinated response to the humanitarian crisis in Haiti

The European Commission has moved immediately to help the victims of the earthquake which struck Haiti by adopting a fast-track "primary emergency" decision of €3 million for immediate relief activities. Relief experts are on their way to Haiti to strengthen the EU's response capabilities on the ground. In addition, the European Union's Civil Protection Mechanism has been activated, with its Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) coordinating the activities. Relief funds are channelled through the Commission's Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) under the responsibility of Commissioner Karel De Gucht. The Commission is already one of the largest humanitarian donors in Haiti providing around €28 million since 2008.

Karel De Gucht, European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, said: "Our thoughts are with the victims of this tragedy and the many people suffering as well as the families of our own colleagues who are awaiting news of their loved-ones. The European Union has acted immediately as it is vital to provide rapid assistance in such a catastrophic situation. €3 million is the maximum amount we can provide in a fast-track primary emergency but we are looking at providing further funding if necessary. In addition, EU Member States have swiftly reacted by activating the civil protection mechanism so that the Commission can also coordinate EU assistance in this respect."

Haiti is the poorest country in the western hemisphere. Over 70% of the population live under the poverty threshold, subsisting on less than USD 2 a day. Haiti's humanitarian needs are vast; the situation worsened in 2008 following the rise in food prices and a particularly destructive cyclone season. The Commission's Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) opened an office in Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, in February 2009.

In response to the 2008 hurricane season, the Commission allocated humanitarian assistance totalling €18.7 million. Currently, projects worth approximately €8 million are being implemented, €7 million of which under the 2009 Global Humanitarian Aid Plan, and whose main objective is to reduce malnutrition and mortality. In addition, disaster preparedness projects are being carried out for a total of over €1 million with the aim of enhancing local preparedness.

ECHO experts work in close cooperation with the Commission's Delegation which is responsible for managing development aid. ECHO staff were on the phone during the quake and most of the staff of the Commission and EU Member States in Haiti seem to be safe. However the whereabouts and situation of some staff members could not yet be verified due to a breakdown of communication lines after the quake. The building housing the Commission's Delegation and the ECHO office has been damaged, and it might prove necessary to re-allocate staff temporarily to Santo Domingo in the neighbouring Dominican Republic.

The European Commission is one of the main donors of humanitarian aid to Haiti. Since 1993 it has provided over € 90 million, enabling humanitarian challenges to be faced and setting up projects to prepare for natural disasters.

The Commission-funded humanitarian projects are implemented by non-governmental relief organisations, specialised UN agencies and the Red Cross.

For further information: http://ec.europa.eu/echo/index_en.htm

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