Statement on behalf of the European Union and its Member States

By

H.E. Mr. Thomas Mayr-Harting
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at the General Assembly

on

Agenda item 69
"Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance"

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- CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY -
Mr President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Serbia* and Albania*, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union and its twenty-eight Member States remain deeply committed to saving lives and reducing human suffering throughout the world, through principled and needs-based humanitarian action, in line with the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid. We remain collectively the world's largest humanitarian donor, and the solidarity of our citizens with those in need has withstood the continued economic hardship in much of Europe.

* The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.
Humanitarian needs worldwide continue to grow dramatically faster than the system's response capacity and available funding. The initial amount requested under the 2015 appeal is a staggering 16.4 billion USD. For the first time since World War II, there are over 50 million displaced. And every time we think "it cannot get worse than this", we stand corrected by a new crisis, which adds itself to the long list of new and protracted crises, pushing the current system to its limits.

We need to try and respond as best we can to this terrible reality. In addition to seeking ways of making additional humanitarian funding available, including from new donors and the private sector, we need to continue efforts to improve the functioning of the current humanitarian system to effectively deliver assistance and use scarce resources efficiently, and we need in parallel to accept to rethink the system and adapt it to the changing world.

We commend the improvements already made to the functioning of the current humanitarian system, and in particular the tireless work to this end by the outgoing Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos, whose achievements in humanitarian coordination and advocacy we wish to hereby acknowledge. Humanitarian
reform must continue, including the continued implementation of the IASC Transformative Agenda in its key aspects of strong humanitarian leadership, strengthened coordination, and clear accountability for the collective response, including to affected populations. In the field, we need strong humanitarian country teams led by experienced resident/humanitarian coordinators. We need collaborative action between implementing agencies, efficient coordination, and coordinated needs assessments and responses. Humanitarian decision-making needs to be based on reliable data, situational evidence and response analysis. Last but not least, all humanitarian actors must feel and be accountable to the overall humanitarian country response, beyond simply delivering on their own individual programmes and mandates.

We also believe that the system, and indeed our whole humanitarian paradigm, needs to be gradually adapted to the changing world. This is why the reflection launched in the run-up to the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit is so significant. This is not to say that the core principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence should be questioned. To the contrary, our reflection should lead us to better apply these key principles in practice. But we should also learn to do more with less, through innovative approaches and new partnerships,
making humanitarian action more effective, and making the system more inclusive and accountable. This will include working with a broader group of actors; listening more attentively to affected populations and local partners when designing or readjusting programmes; basing an increasing proportion of our funding on risk rather than needs, including through the use of new risk management tools; using to their full extent new and innovative technologies and delivery methods; and so forth. We intend to actively contribute to preparations for the WHS, including in the European consultation in Budapest in February 2015.

Mr President,

In the run-up to the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, we believe that it will be essential to ensure adequate humanitarian contributions to the 2015 processes, including work on Sustainable Development Goals, Climate Change, and the post-Hyogo framework for disaster risk reduction to be agreed in Sendai next March. Humanitarian and development actors, and not least national governments, must make it their core task to strengthen disaster resilience, through disaster risk reduction including preparedness. This is far more cost-effective than
emergency response, and this is what will enable us to save more lives tomorrow, to paraphrase OCHA's recent report. And while typhoon Hagupit, which hit the Philippines some days ago, unfortunately demonstrates that such phenomena may be becoming the new norm in many regions, it also demonstrates that preparedness helps save lives and money. Both in regions prone to natural disasters and in situations of chronic vulnerability such as the Sahel, preventive action and resilience-building must become the norm, and must receive all the attention and funding they deserve. The EU and its Member States intend to remain at the forefront of this agenda.

Natural disasters are unfortunately not the only challenge we are facing. It is difficult at this point of time not to mention the Ebola virus outbreak, whose spread is threatening the very fabric of society in the most affected countries. Our coordinated efforts in addressing this scourge must continue unabated.

But conflicts are clearly the greatest overall challenge facing the humanitarian community today. The four "Level 3" crises in CAR, Iraq, South Sudan and Syria will eat up over two-thirds of next year's appeal, but needs will remain considerable – and often unmet – also in Afghanistan, DRC, Myanmar, Palestine, Somalia,
Sudan, Ukraine, Yemen and other countries. There can be no humanitarian solution to any of these conflicts. But while political solutions are being worked on, it is crucial to allow humanitarians to do their work fully, including accessing all the population in need regardless of which side of the front line they are on. The European Union calls on all parties to grant rapid and unimpeded access for humanitarian aid to all the affected population, and recalls that arbitrary denial of humanitarian access constitutes a violation of international humanitarian law, for which an improved system of accountability should be developed. The centrality of protection in many of today’s humanitarian crises and complex emergencies has to be operationalised from the start, and protection of the most vulnerable, including refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, must be ensured. The specific needs of women, girls, boys and men, or of the disabled, must be adequately addressed.

Finally, all parties to the conflict must ensure the respect and protection of humanitarian personnel, or of health care personnel. The fact that the number of deliberate attacks against humanitarians in 2013 was the highest ever recorded, with at least 155 killed, 171 injured and 134 abducted in these attacks, is profoundly shocking. Translating this shared indignation into
action is what we are hoping to achieve, including through the annual resolution on the safety and security of humanitarian and UN personnel which the EU facilitates.

Mr President,

The challenges facing the humanitarian community are enormous. As UN General Assembly, we need to contribute to their task through the resolutions we are unanimously adopting today, by strengthening the agreed framework for humanitarian action in the successor resolution to 46/182, and by recalling the need to ensure the safety and security of humanitarians and UN personnel. These and other humanitarian resolutions are and should remain genuinely consensual, as a testimony to our common humanity.

Thank you.