

Conference Disaster Risk Reduction - Belgian Statement

Belgium fully supports the statement pronounced by the European Union on its behalf.

In addition, please allow me to highlight in two minutes, some pertinent areas and countries, where Belgium has been active to help in disaster prevention, preparedness, and response:

I. Disaster prevention

In recent years Belgium has expressed its clear support for the setting up of the new European civil protection mechanism, which is both preparedness-oriented and overall disaster response-oriented and now comprises a new and complete section dedicated to disaster prevention.

At every instance, Belgium tries to align its assistance to disasters, as transversally as possible, across the disaster management cycle. The scope of its response to the Ebola outbreak is an excellent example of the Belgian involvement which includes in this case: research on vaccines; the sending of logistical support and means as well as a mobile laboratory in Guinea (blood tests to diagnose Ebola); SN Brussels Airlines flights headed for affected countries; and support from MSF and UNICEF within the same framework (linked to the laboratory activities in Guinea and which notably aims to raise municipalities' awareness, and linked to the construction of communal medical centers). These concrete actions, providing tangible lifelines to the local population, constitute a vital complement to the substantial financial aid that Belgium provided to fighting Ebola.

II. Disaster preparedness

Concerning the disaster management cycle, Belgium assigns great importance to the "preparedness" phase. During its Presidency of the Council of the EU, Belgium has developed the principle of "Host Nation Support" (HNS), with regard to receiving assistance during a major emergency. It principally consists in preparing, on the territory of States which have experienced a disaster and asked for international assistance, the on-the-spot integration of international teams mobilized in order to support them. In the same way, Belgium is very active in the organization of large-scale European civil protection exercises.

Disaster preparedness projects are financed via the Belgian Humanitarian Aid within our Development Cooperation Policy. For this purpose, it is appropriate to give a few examples of the numerous projects which have been realized for the last few years:

- preparedness and strengthening of the living resources of vulnerable households facing disaster risks in Nigeria, Senegal and Chad, amounting to 900 000 EUR and headed by the FAO;

- risk reduction and capacity building of communities in the Ichilo river basin in the municipality of Puerto Villarroel (Bolivia), amounting to 144 000 EUR and managed by the International Red Cross-Flanders;
- multi-level and inter-sectorial preparedness in communities of Bolivia, Peru, Honduras, Guatemala and Cuba, to strengthen the resiliency of children, women and families to be prepared and respond in emergencies with support of their authorities, amounting to 985 000 EUR and led by the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF);
- and enhancement of children and their families’ resilience to disaster risks and strengthening of their preparedness to respond to emergencies in Mozambique, amounting to 1, 3 million EUR and managed by UNICEF.

Ten years ago, the world experienced one of the largest natural disasters in history, the terrible 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. In its wake, Belgium has worked within the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO to enhance preparedness for this particular risk. The Belgian contribution has been focused on scientific capacity building and data management for the operational tsunami early warning systems. A very specific support in this regard is the Sea Level Station Monitoring Facility operated by the Flemish Marine Institute which provides access, at no cost to users, to data from virtually all sea-level monitoring stations around the world. With this system more than 130 institutes from 97 countries already share their sea level data within minutes, allowing regional warning centers to closely follow the progression of possible tsunami waves. The facility is still expanding: in 2014 on average one extra new station was added per week.

III. Post-disaster response

With regard to post-disaster response, Belgian government has a unique mechanism called B-FAST (Belgian First Aid and Support Team) which provides emergency response capacities to other countries whose own resources are insufficient to face a disaster. These capacities include humanitarian goods, dispatching of experts in assessment or for coordination, or sending of teams (modules). The actions related to emergency relief are as much as possible multilaterally framed both at European (EU Civil Protection Mechanism) and global levels (United Nations OCHA Emergency Services Branch: UNDAC and INSARAG). Among the foreign disasters which have left their mark on the past decade, B-FAST was prominently present and active in the aftermath of typhoon Haiyan (Philippines, November 2013), Port-au-Prince earthquake (Haiti, January 2010), Aceh tsunami (Indonesia and Thailand, December 2004 – January 2005), and Al Hoceima earthquake (Morocco, February 2004).