

Steven Vanackere, Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs
EU Statement on the Occasion of the General Assembly Plenary Meeting on the
Humanitarian Situation resulting from the Floods in Pakistan
New York, 19 August 2010

Mr. President,
Mr Secretary General,
Your Excellencies,

I have the honour to speak today on behalf of the European Union – for all 27 Member States, our European Institutions, and our citizens, and to also bring a special message of support from the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton, who would have liked to represent the European Union here today and is looking forward to the time when this will be possible.

I would like first of all to express our solidarity with and our sincere condolences to the Government and the people of Pakistan following the tragic loss of life in the monsoon floods in the north and centre of the country. We share the grief of the affected families and express our heartfelt sympathy with those who have lost so much as a result of this unprecedented catastrophe.

The European Union welcomes the adoption today by the General Assembly of the resolution that encourages the international community to help Pakistan. I can assure you that the European Union and all its Member States will contribute to the full implementation of this resolution.

The European Union is actively participating in the immediate global response to this humanitarian disaster and strongly supports the efforts of the United Nations and the Pakistani authorities as they provide vital assistance to those in need.

I would like to stress that we will continue to support this work as long as needed - the international community is in this for the long term. The EU will work with

Pakistan to mitigate the impact of this disaster on the daily life and wellbeing of the Pakistani people.

Mr. President,

The European Union and Pakistan share a long lasting friendship. Last June, the second EU-Pakistan Summit set the basis for a strategic dialogue, which includes the promotion of disaster risk reduction and the effective provision of humanitarian assistance. Before this disaster, the European Union had already allocated more than 400 million euros in assistance to Pakistan for the period 2007-2010, on economic development and trade as well as on governance and human rights.

Today, the EU steps up considerably its support for Pakistan and for the Pakistani people. Since the beginning of the crisis, the EU and its Member States have already committed over 110 million euros, and I am pleased to announce that this amount will be increased by 30 million euros. In total, this means that the European Union has committed more than 140 million euros, or the equivalent of 180 million US dollars. And let me underline that this humanitarian assistance is provided on the basis of the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, and according to the needs on the ground.

In addition to the humanitarian funds, there are in-kind contributions from a large number of EU Member States, which need to be coordinated in order to maximise their impact on the ground. This is why the European Union has dispatched a full team of the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism to Islamabad.

Mr. President,

In the wake of this crisis, there is no room for complacency. The number of people who are in dire need of assistance is rising and will continue to do so as assessments continue and access improves. In order to provide the most adequate and comprehensive response notably to address the food, sanitation and health needs, all European Union institutions are working hand-in-hand.

The EU High Representative Catherine Ashton, together with her European Commission's colleagues in charge of humanitarian and development aid, is coordinating the EU assessment of both short and long term implications of the crisis. The European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, Kristalina Georgieva, will be travelling to Pakistan in a few days to underpin EU efforts in support of the victims of this humanitarian disaster and support the coordination efforts of the United Nations and the Pakistani authorities.

Mr President,

As we all know, access remains a major challenge, and we are examining very carefully how all necessary assets can be deployed as a matter of priority. In a region still affected by a conflict which has triggered the displacement of millions of people since 2009, it is crucial that humanitarian aid is perceived as neutral and in line with international humanitarian law and on the basis of the humanitarian principles , of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence, and according to the needs on the ground.

I would like to particularly stress this point today, the world humanitarian day, which is dedicated to all the relief workers, including those who lost their lives while helping others.

As it is the case within the European Union, coordination is paramount for international actors. The National and Provincial Pakistani authorities are clearly leading the response. At the same time, we would encourage all organisations to work with the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid (OCHA) and the Emergency Relief Coordinator to strengthen the coordination, effectiveness and efficiency of the assistance. As we have seen in the case of Haiti, the consequences of a natural disaster may be overwhelming and it is crucial that all actors cooperate to make the response as effective as possible.

Mr President,

Let me conclude with a few words on Pakistan's security and stability. The EU strongly encourages the international community to support Pakistan in a lasting manner: Only if efforts are sustained can there be a long-term recovery.

Pakistan will be particularly high on the agenda of the next informal meeting of EU Foreign Affairs Ministers at the beginning of September and we are particularly looking forward to hosting the Friends of Pakistan ministerial meeting in October in Brussels, a meeting that will be able to take stock of relief provided and plan for rebuilding efforts.

It is in times of adversity that we realise that true solidarity is not only about words and convictions; it is also about actions that make a difference in the life of people. Let us now make sure that our solidarity is efficient, coordinated, and sustained.

Thank you, Mr. President.