

E-0058/05 18 January 2005

WRITTEN QUESTION by Nirj Deva (PPE-DE) to the Commission

Subject: Early warning systems and tsunami Answer(s)

Will the Commission request reports from its representatives in countries affected by the tsunami disaster as to the following matters: 1. What warnings were received, when and by whom?

2. What action was taken on any warnings, when and by whom?

3. What systems are needed to ensure so far as possible that everyone concerned is warned in time?

4. Should international warnings go direct to the international broadcast media under an agreed protocol, and not be filtered through governments, whose key people may be absent or asleep, or may lack authority to take immediate action?

5. What civil defence arrangements were in force before the disaster, what training and information had local people received, and what further organisation is needed?

6. Specifically what basic medical training had local people received in order to deal with casualties before help could arrive?

7. What systems were in place before the disaster to identify the location of emergency supplies?

8. What transport planning had been done to deliver emergency supplies to where they were needed, bearing in mind that natural disasters can be expected to disrupt the local roads and railways?

9. In relation to points 7 and 8, what planning had the EU itself done?

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Answer given by Mrs Ferrero-Waldner on behalf of the Commission

At this point in time, review of initial responses to the Indian Ocean earthquake and consequent tsunami is ongoing.

1 and 2. Officials across the Commission and in Delegations were alerted by e-mail or SMS to the Indian Ocean earthquake through the Joint Research Centre's Global Disaster Alert System (GDAS). Freely available to the public, this system provides near instantaneous alerts to earthquakes and hurricanes worldwide. However, the system does not automatically warn of earthquake-related phenomena such as tsunamis.

Commission Delegations in affected countries have been directed to request information on initial early warning actions from host governments. While individual officials in Delegations in the affected region were alerted to the Indian Ocean earthquake via GDAS, it is important to note that no Commission Delegations in the affected countries were included in any national early warning system in place on 26 December 2004.

3. The Commission has been actively involved in developing the early warning capacity of countries in the South Asia, South East Asia regions and beyond since well before the 26 December 2004 tragedy. In fact, the Commission has developed considerable expertise in this field through its Disaster Preparedness Programme (Dipecho) and has developed an actionable view of the early warning capabilities of many partner governments worldwide, including most of those affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami.

As denoted in the EU Action Plan adopted by the General Affairs and External Relations Council, developing early warning capabilities to manage future tsunamis and other natural and/or man-made disasters will continue to form key parts of the Community's tsunami-related assistance. This importance of effective early warning and the need to reinforce preventive measures for early warning and disaster preparedness was further emphasised by the President of the Commission in his presentation to the Council on 31 January 2005.

To date, the Commission has committed € 2 million towards the development of a United Nations (UN)-led regional early warning system that will register tsunami and multiple other threats following the 6 January 2005 UN Flash Appeal on the tsunami and the confirmed commitments of the international community at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe in January 2005.

4. It is important to note that early warning systems not supported by preparedness measures in at-risk communities will not be effective. As such, the European Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) will provide technical assistance to ensure that any implemented regional system is integrated with sufficient citizen alert provisions. The Commission's proposed facilitation of the transfer of citizen alert technology will further complement this initiative.

5 to 8. It is expected that the governments of countries affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami will pursue investigations into and prepare reports on the state of preparedness for major disaster response in their respective territories.

9. As ECHO does not undertake the direct implementation of relief operations, it relies on the capacity of its partners (UN agencies, Red Cross/Red Crescent, non-governmental organisations) to deliver immediately emergency supplies, as it was done following the tsunami.

In order to make sure that this rapid response capacity is in place among its main partners, ECHO has provided funding to several UN agencies and the International Federation of the Red Cross to develop their emergency preparedness strategies including the constitution of emergency humanitarian supplies stocks. In addition, since 2004, ECHO is in the process of strengthening its rapid reaction capacity in Asia through both the reinforcement of its regional support office for South East Asia based in Bangkok and the creation of a new regional support office for South Asia based in Delhi. One of the core functions of the regional support offices is to ensure a rapid deployment of ECHO field teams following a disaster so that humanitarian needs are quickly assessed and the ECHO partners able to provide a response are swiftly identified and provided with funds. The regional support office in Bangkok coordinated the immediate deployment of 10 ECHO technical assistants in the affected countries. This allowed ECHO to commit € 23 million during the first week following the tsunami, thus enabling our partners to provide relief to the victims from the first day.