

Benita Ferrero-Waldner
Member of the European Commission

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13 June 2008

Dear Sirs,

I would like to thank you for your message of 22 May 2008, concerning the plight of the people of Burma/Myanmar after Cyclone Nargis and our responsibility to help. I can assure you that the European Commission responded very quickly in the aftermath of the cyclone. The Commission's humanitarian aid department, ECHO, mobilised an initial € 2 million emergency programme to provide immediate relief, and has since increased assistance to € 12 million. Another € 5 million has been committed in the form of food aid. The European Civil Protection Mechanism (MIC) has also been mobilised.

All of the European Commission's assistance is being channelled directly to people in need, through specialised European NGOs and UN agencies. We are funding the provision of shelter and non-food items, water purification systems and drinking water, sanitation, primary healthcare, trauma care and basic surgical services. The European Commission is also facilitating and coordinating relief efforts by the EU Member States.

In addition to this, the Commission has been in contact with the Government of Burma/Myanmar about improving access to the affected areas for international aid operators. I have written to the Foreign Minister in this sense. My colleague Commissioner Louis Michel, who is in charge of ECHO, was among the first high-level personalities to travel to Yangon, in order to negotiate better access for international assistance.

The Commission has also participated in the International Conference in Yangon on 25 May under the auspices of UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon together with another 50 parties. This Conference decided that relief efforts and access remained the priority and that eventual rehabilitation should be based on a thorough needs assessment.

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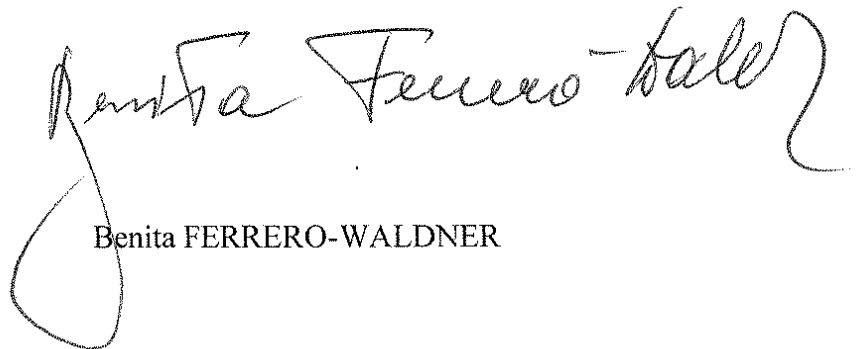
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... / ...

Regarding your concern about assistance taking priority over national sovereignty, may I remind you that the concept of "responsibility to protect" was originally conceived by the UN to deal with situations of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. It is unclear whether it can be applied to a situation after a natural disaster even where the authorities concerned were so slow to react adequately. I think that in order to help the victims, we should ensure that humanitarian principles, in particular those of impartiality and neutrality, are completely respected.

I hope that this information will reassure you of the European Commission's wholehearted commitment to helping the citizens of Burma/Myanmar.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Benita Ferrero-Waldner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'B'.

Benita FERRERO-WALDNER