

TV mustn't hide need for long term aid, aid official says.

Blackburn, Peter

Reuters, April 7, 1994

BRUSSELS, April 7 (Reuter) - Emergency aid operations highlighted on television risked overshadowing the long term development work of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), a senior independent aid agency official said on Thursday.

"The need for a long-term development strategy is relegated to second place by TV news cameras," Guido Dumon, president of the NGO-EU Liaison Committee, said at the opening of a three-day assembly of 700 European NGOs.

NGOs were in danger of becoming sub-contractors of governments and international organisations, such as the European Union, he said.

"We note a growing pressure on NGOs to support official development policies. NGOs are in danger of becoming government tools and losing their independence."

European Development Commissioner Manuel Marin said NGOs were increasingly important in implementing EU aid programmes.

Aid channelled through the organisations had risen five-fold over the past decade to nearly 800 million in 1993 and would soon top 1.0 billion, he said. NGOs distributed nearly half of EU humanitarian aid last year.

"NGOs deal efficiently with emergencies and rebuilding, and provide a basis which will in the medium and long terms help the peoples to fend for themselves," he said.

But the huge sums now involved meant stricter financial controls were needed, he added.

In response to NGO criticism about short-sighted aid policies, Marin said the EU began last year to bridge the gap between emergency and long-term development aid.

The EU is starting to help countries like Somalia and Cambodia, which are emerging from war or natural disasters, to repair water supplies, hospitals and other basic infrastructure.

"But rehabilitation aid is high risk both politically and financially," Marin warned. "Look at Rwanda and Burundi...in such a situation nothing is assured...our programmes can be wiped out overnight."

Another concern among NGOs is a growing dependence on the military in countries such as ex-Yugoslavia and Somalia and questions it raised about the "right of interference."

NGOs want to be autonomous and see military intervention as the worst of all evils. But in some cases it would otherwise be impossible to deliver aid, he said.

The former UNPROFOR Commander in Bosnia General Francis Briquemont will be among speakers at a debate on the role of NGOs in "Conflict, Development and Military Intervention" on Friday and Saturday.

(c) Reuters Limited 1994