

Press Release

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PACE Committee calls on Myanmar's and China's authorities to lift restrictions on international humanitarian aid

Strasbourg, 20.05.2008 - At the opening today in Paris of a hearing on the problem of environmental refugees, the Committee on Migration of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) expressed compassion and solidarity with the families of the tens of thousands victims of the natural disasters that have recently devastated regions of Myanmar and China and called on the authorities of the two countries to allow a massive aid effort to the areas affected.

"The restrictions on foreign aid workers and equipment are increasing the risk of starvation and disease of thousands of people," said the Chair of the Committee, Corien Jonker (Netherlands, EPP/CD), on behalf of the committee. "The limited assistance from Asian neighbours that has been allowed will not be enough for all those in desperate need of help. It is vital that the authorities of the two countries urgently lift any restriction imposed on access for international humanitarian aid to the areas devastated. No effort should be spared to prevent a massive second wave of deaths."

The hearing on environmental refugees stressed that climate change is as big a threat to people, the planet and peace as international terrorism. According to the report under preparation, drafted by Tina Ackefort (Sweden, ALDE), "environmental degradation causes large displacements of people which can lead to instability and provoke conflict situations and wars. To avoid this, European countries should be at the forefront in addressing the problem of environmental displacement."

According to the participants, 60 000 deaths from climate-related natural disasters occur every year. Many more are injured, not to mention the huge number of displaced persons, which reaches into the hundreds of millions. The same specialists considered that a 20 billion USD fund should be created by the World Bank and other financial institutions to help developing countries cope with climate change. The participants also underlined that today, climate change, migration and threats to peace are at the top of the international agenda but the interlinkage between them should be given more attention.

The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 318 members from the national parliaments of the 47 member states.

President: Lluís Maria de Puig (Spain, SOC) ; Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

Political Groups: EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); SOC (Socialist Group); EDG (European Democratic Group); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).