

WRITTEN QUESTION P-3131/09
by Frithjof Schmidt (Verts/ALE)
to the Commission

Subject: Funding to support the refugees in the Thailand-Burma border region

ECHO has cut funding for refugee assistance on the Thailand-Burma border, including that to the Thai Burma Border Consortium, which saw a reduction of assistance from € 6m in 2007 and 2008 to € 5.5m in 2009. Further cuts have been indicated for 2010. Meanwhile, the number of refugees in the camps as well as the prices for the provision of food and other aid have risen in the region. Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner states in her answer to Written Question E-0482/09 by Raül Romeva i Rueda on the same topic: 'The long-standing existence of the refugee camps makes it necessary to look at political solutions, in parallel to maintaining a humanitarian engagement'. In addition, NGOs have been referred to the Aid to Uprooted Peoples Programme (AUP) as a potential substitute for the lost ECHO funding. However, since 2007 the AUP Programme has not funded food assistance any more, in order to avoid overlap with ECHO's mandate. Moreover, the procedures and criteria used by the AUP Programme in awarding tenders for assistance for basic health and sanitary needs are different and more time-consuming than those used by ECHO so that there is a serious risk of a gap in funding. As Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner states, 'these non-governmental organizations (NGOs) [are] performing well and reliably, [and] has (sic!) been for many years a beneficiary of Commission funding (through its humanitarian aid department (DG ECHO))'.

Why does the Commission cut humanitarian aid spending for refugees in need while no alternative way of meeting the basic humanitarian needs of the refugees has yet been ensured?

How will ECHO and DG RELEX together ensure that there will not be any gap in financing to meet the food, health and sanitary needs of the refugees due to the cuts in ECHO's funding?