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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Work Programme of Swedish Presidency for COHAFA Working Party 1 January – 30 June 2023

On behalf of the Presidency, delegations will find in annex the work programme of the Swedish Presidency for the Working Party on Humanitarian Aid and Food Aid (COHAFA) from 1 January to 30 June 2023.

WORK PROGRAMME OF SWEDISH PRESIDENCY FOR COHAFA WORKING PARTY

1 JANUARY – 30 JUNE 2023

Humanitarian needs have reached unprecedented levels and the war in Ukraine has further exacerbated them. According to the United Nations Global Humanitarian Overview 2023, next year will set another record for humanitarian relief requirements with 339 million people in need of assistance in 69 countries. As late as 2019, the same number was 132 million. The war in Ukraine, the global rise in food prices and the escalating consequences of climate change have significantly worsened the situation.

During the COHAFA Presidency, Sweden will endeavour to increase the collective impact of the EU and its Member States in the field of humanitarian aid, including enhanced exchanges ahead of key meetings in multilateral organisations.

The Swedish Presidency will follow up the implementation of the European Commission's Communication on "The EU's humanitarian action: new challenges, same principles" of 10 March 2021 and the subsequent Council Conclusions adopted on 20 May 2021.

The Swedish Presidency will seek to strengthen the working party as a relevant instrument for cooperation on humanitarian assistance. This includes ensuring continuity through the joint COHAFA trio programme (with trio partners France and Czech Republic), the organisation of the second edition of the European Humanitarian Forum as well as holding a director-level COHAFA meeting.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The overall objective of the Swedish Presidency will seek to identify common solutions to bridge the dramatic and growing gap between funding needs for humanitarian action and available resources.

The COHAFA discussions will be structured around a specific set of policy and strategic challenges, focusing on achieving tangible joint outcomes expressing concrete recommendations and commitments within the following areas:

1. Expanding the resource base for humanitarian action
2. Prioritising life-saving assistance and aligning humanitarian needs with resources
3. Unlocking efficiency through multiannual and flexible funding
4. Responding to climate-induced humanitarian crises and scaling up anticipatory action
5. Reducing humanitarian needs by upholding basic services in politically complex settings.

Each COHAFA meeting will include an exchange of views on one of the above five themes and feature discussions around major humanitarian crises, including those that receive less attention, and relevant policy issues such as International Humanitarian Law (IHL), humanitarian principles and safeguarding humanitarian access, the centrality of protection, humanitarian exemptions in sanctions.

WORKING METHODS

To enhance the debate and knowledge around some agenda items and thematic priorities, the Swedish Presidency will continue the practise of inviting experts, civil society and international organisations to attend the meetings, where relevant. Joint meetings with other Working Parties may be planned.

The Swedish Presidency will also update common messages, as appropriate, and may propose to adopt Council Conclusions.

The Presidency reserves the right to make amendments to the programme as needed, including adding discussions on new crises.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY THEMES

- ***Expanding the resource base for humanitarian action***

According to the UN and other partner organisations, \$51.5 billion will be required to assist the most vulnerable in need in 2023 (Global Humanitarian Overview 2023). At the same time, the resource base for humanitarian action is very narrow, with a small number of donors covering the overall humanitarian funding. Globally, the ten largest donors of humanitarian aid provide more than 80 percent of all the funding. Within the EU alone, five Member States (Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Belgium) contribute some 85 percent of Member States total humanitarian funding. There is a need for greater effort to share the responsibility for humanitarian funding more broadly and equitably. During the Swedish Presidency, avenues will be explored on how to increase the resource base in line with the Council Conclusions of May 2021.

- ***Prioritising life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable and aligning humanitarian needs with resources***

The world is experiencing a daunting increase in humanitarian needs resulting from the combination of protracted conflicts, climate change and food insecurity. This includes particular risks for those in the most vulnerable situations. At the same time, we are entering a global economic recession that threatens the size of humanitarian budgets. The gap between humanitarian funding and humanitarian needs is larger than ever before, to cover targeted people in need. More funding is needed but we also need to improve the efficiency of humanitarian action and prioritise life-saving assistance to the most vulnerable people based on severity of needs.

- ***Unlocking efficiency through multiannual and flexible funding***

With the establishment of the Grand Bargain in 2016, key humanitarian actors have made several commitments to improve the quality of humanitarian funding. There is clear evidence that multiannual and flexible humanitarian funding can deliver better results to people in need and contributes to a more effective, transparent, and coherent humanitarian response. Quality funding is also crucial for the humanitarian system to rapidly respond to sudden onset crises and rapidly worsening ones. However, quality funding also needs to be met on the side of aid organisations with more transparency, accountability, and efficiency. Progress so far has been limited and action is needed ahead of the expiry of the Grand Bargain in 2023. Several donors have been applying programmatic approaches, facilitating quality funding. An exchange of practices is useful to develop these approaches further.

- ***Responding to climate-induced humanitarian crises and scaling up anticipatory action***

There is clear evidence that acting ahead of climate-related and environmental crises, such as droughts and floods, through anticipatory action saves lives and livelihoods, including amongst those in the most vulnerable situations. Several aid organisations and donors have in recent years launched a number of successful pilot projects. Anticipatory action also requires climate financing and other development financing to transform the entire aid system across the HDP nexus from a reactive systemic stance to an anticipatory stance. It requires a coordinated, harmonised approach between aid organisations for a truly effective action.

- ***Reducing humanitarian needs by upholding basic services in politically complex settings***

A number of contexts such as Afghanistan, Syria, Mali, Sudan, Myanmar and Yemen manifest the urgent need to identify aid modalities in politically complex contexts where donors are unable to work with or through the national government. Identifying ways to deliver aid for upholding basic services is crucial in order to preserve development gains and alleviate the heavily strained humanitarian system, which is not mandated to, nor has the financial capacity to, absorb essential services such as health, education, water and sanitation. Sweden has initiated and financed a study by the Center for International Cooperation and Chatham House to identify concrete ways for donors and multilateral actors such as the World Bank, the EU, and the UN, to stay engaged in the most challenging political situations.

THE EUROPEAN HUMANITARIAN FORUM

One of the key events during the Swedish COHAFA Presidency will be to co-host the European Humanitarian Forum (EHF) with the European Commission. The Forum will take place in a context of sharply increasing humanitarian needs, changing geopolitical realities and a shrinking humanitarian space with the war in Ukraine as a notable case in point and will offer an opportunity to strengthen the cooperation and partnership among countries affected by the crises, donors, international stakeholders, the EU, and its Member States. Through high-level discussions, political debates and practical workshops, the Forum will serve to jointly put forward innovative, sustainable, and efficient approaches to address the current challenges of the humanitarian world.

CALENDAR

11–12 January	COHAFA meeting in Brussels
1–2 February	COHAFA meeting in Brussels
8 March	Director-level COHAFA meeting in Brussels
9 March	COHAFA meeting in Brussels
20–21 March	2 nd edition of the European Humanitarian Forum in Brussels
4–5 April	COHAFA meeting in Brussels
3–4 May	COHAFA meeting in Brussels
24–25 May	Informal COHAFA/CODEV meeting in Stockholm
20–21 June	COHAFA meeting in Brussels

TBC: Meeting of the EU Directors-General in charge of Humanitarian Aid (possibly in the margins of the EHF in March)

INDICATIVE CALENDAR OF MAIN HUMANITARIAN EVENTS

January

23–24 January	Lake Chad Basin Conference (Niamey)
30 January–7 February	WHO Executive Board meeting (Geneva)

February

2 February	ICRC DSG Policy Forum (Geneva)
7–10 February	UNICEF Executive Board meeting (New York)
13 February	Senior Officials Meeting Ukraine (Brussels)
19 February	OCHA Donor Support Group (ODSG) High-level meeting (Riyadh)
20–21 February	Riyadh International Humanitarian Forum (Riyadh)
27 February–3 March	WFP Executive Board meeting (Rome)

March

7–8 March	UNRWA Sub-Committee meeting (Amman)
7–9 March	UNHCR Standing Committee meeting (Geneva)
16–17 March	Venezuela Solidarity Conference (Brussels)
20–21 March	European Humanitarian Forum (Brussels)
March	Senior Officials Meeting Syria (TBC)

April

17–28 April Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week (Geneva)

25–26 April UNRWA Sub-Committee meeting (Amman)

May

15–16 May Brussels VII Conference on the Syria Crisis (Brussels)

18–19 May UNGA High-Level Meeting on the Mid-term review of the Sendai Framework (New York)

21–30 May World Health Assembly (Geneva)

May Senior Officials Meeting Yemen (Brussels)

June

13–14 June ICRC Donor Support Group (DSG) annual meeting (Tokyo)

13–16 June UNICEF Executive Board annual meeting (New York)

20 June World Refugee Day

20–21 June UNRWA Advisory Commission meeting (Beirut)

21–23 June ECOSOC Humanitarian Affairs Segment (HAS) (Geneva)

26–30 June WFP Executive Board annual meeting (Rome)

June Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) High-level meeting (TBC)

June Annual meeting of the Grand Bargain (Geneva)

June OCHA Donor Support Group (ODSG) High-level meeting (Riyadh)

TBC: High-level pledging events (Yemen, Afghanistan etc.)

SWEDISH COHAFA TEAM

Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Sofia H. Karlsson (Chair)

Alice Wadström (national delegate)

Michelle Warttinen (assistant national delegate)

Permanent Representation in Brussels

Hampus Rein (co-ordination)
