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**Introductory Remarks at the Hearing of the  
European Parliament**

Check Against Delivery  
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi  
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

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Madame la Présidente,  
Madame le Rapporteur Permanent,  
Honourable Members, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and a privilege to be here today as Commissioner designate for the new portfolio of international cooperation, humanitarian aid and crisis response. It is also a great responsibility. For those most in need around the World, this is the most important portfolio of the Commission. With its establishment our Union recognises an ominous trend: the occurrence and the intensity of natural and man-made disasters are growing. It is also the right step to bring together humanitarian aid and civil response. They go hand in hand, and an overwhelming majority, more than 90 percent, of our citizens, are keen to see Europe stepping up its disaster preparedness and response efforts around the world.

Today we are in the midst of a crisis that cost more than 150,000 Haitians their lives. Words can not express the sorrow of – and for - those affected.

Before the earthquake on January 12th, Haiti was striving to overcome the legacy of structural problems and the impact of 2008's hurricanes. Hard-won development gains are now gone. Haiti starts from scratch, but not alone. If confirmed, it will be my immediate duty to make sure we, Europeans, bring to Haiti the best our Union has to offer.

We acted decisively when the earthquake struck. On day 1, financial support was approved and our staff was on the ground. As a necessary immediate emergency response, the Commission released 3 million Euros within hours of the earthquake. On day 2, humanitarian partners and civil protection ensured that tens of thousands of Haitians had access to safe drinking water. 25 European countries sent much needed support, all coordinated by our civil protection Monitoring and Information Centre. As always, Europe has shown unmatched generosity, committing in total more than €500 million to both immediate relief and assistance for long term reconstruction. In addition, an impressive number of private donations show the solidarity of European citizens with those in need.

There are now two priority tasks in Haiti. First, to act decisively in continuing to deliver immediate relief – especially shelter, food and health services. The challenges are tremendous: we need shelter for approximately 1,000,000 Haitians, and post-operative medical supplies, antibiotics and care facilities for tens of thousands of people.

Second, we must start the work on integrating relief, reconstruction and long-term development. To succeed, the Haitian Government has to be in the lead. For this reason we are mobilising €100 million for non-humanitarian aid, primarily to help restore Government functions and services. Next week, the Commission will participate in an international mission to Haiti, to prepare a joint needs assessment, which will guide our collective efforts in the years to come and ensure effective use of scarce resources.

Post-Haiti we also must address the question that today is on everybody's mind: what can we do for a faster, more united, more visible Europe when the next disaster hits?

I am glad to see that next week, the Union's disaster response capacity will be on the agenda of the informal European Council. I will actively follow up on the Council's deliberations and I will seek guidance from the Barnier report and other relevant proposals. I would like to seek an early opportunity to discuss these issues with this Committee.

Honourable Members,

There are too many places like Haiti, where a hurricane or a flood, or an ethnic conflict, can cause loss of lives and push millions, especially women and children, into extreme poverty. Whether it is massive flooding in Bangladesh or conflict in Sudan, the result is the same – people suffer. Every year, some 300 million are affected by natural disasters or man-made calamities. A staggering number – at least 42 million people – have had to leave their homes, seeking refuge within or outside their countries. And these numbers are destined to go up – because of climate change, because of rapid urbanisation, and because of state fragility.

These are the pledges I make to you today. If confirmed:

- I will strive to be a strong voice for those in dire need.
- I will strongly promote the priorities that we have agreed on in the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid: more efficient aid, a better response capacity, improved coordination within the EU, and between humanitarian and military actors.
- I will stand up as an advocate for the respect of International Humanitarian Law and will speak up when humanitarian workers are killed, prisoners are abused and sexual violence is used as a weapon of war and destruction of innocent people's lives.

- I will do my very best to deliver on our commitment to disaster risk reduction and to build up our capacity to cope with the humanitarian impact of climate change; I will review and strengthen our civil protection instrument.
- I will implement the mandate from the Lisbon Treaty to establish the European Voluntary Humanitarian Corps, providing a pool of expertise for our humanitarian efforts and a platform for putting our European values to work.
- Last, but not least: I will commit to work with my colleagues in the College to ensure we use our resources effectively, we improve the coordination of our actions and make our fellow European citizens proud of their support for humanitarian aid and disaster response.

We live at a time of increasing needs and more intense competition for resources, within the EU and across the development agenda.

The dual challenge, of expanding needs and shrinking budgets, makes the task of coordination – within the

Commission, among Member States, and with other partners – exceptionally important.

Inside the Commission, close cooperation with Baroness Ashton and Mr. Piebalgs would allow me to leverage the Commission's full potential in achieving our common objectives.

I also will work closely with my fellow Commissioners in charge of home affairs, environment, and climate action in the area of crisis response.

Honourable Members,

In my long years in development, I have learned a simple, but very important lesson: no one person can succeed on their own, but working together we can make a difference. It is with this belief I approach today's hearing, and, if confirmed, will be coming to this Committee for your guidance in the future.

I welcome your questions.