

Brussels, 14 March 2011

## **The European Union's response to the earthquake and the nuclear plant situation in Japan**

Since the devastating earthquake which struck Japan on Friday 11 March, the European Union is fully mobilised to translate its solidarity in concrete support.

The Civil Protection coordination mechanism (MIC) is preparing to coordinate deployment of in kind assistance and experts from Europe, as soon as the Japanese authorities so request it. Inside the Commission, a coordination group of nuclear experts has been established to exchange information, assess it and be ready to assist in case the situation in nuclear power plants further deteriorates.

### **The European Union Civil protection assistance**

The Commission's humanitarian and civil protection service (ECHO) follows the situation on a 24/7 basis through its Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC) and its humanitarian offices in Bangkok, Jakarta and Manila.

So far, 20 Member States have offered personnel or material through the European Civil Protection Mechanism, to help Japan in these difficult times. These are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Slovakia, Spain, Finland, France, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

The in kind assistance offers comprise water purification units, field hospitals, advanced medical posts, Emergency Temporary Shelters (ETS). The First response teams ready for departure include medical and logistics experts, Search & Rescue as well as decontamination experts.

The European Commission Civil Protection mechanism has dispatched a civil liaison officer to Japan last night to reinforce the EU Delegation in Tokyo and prepare a possible deployment of a coordination team.

The Commission is in permanent contact with the Japanese Mission to the EU in Brussels which expressed its gratitude for EU's offers but - due to the difficulty of gaining secure access to the affected areas - asks to wait for the dispatch of any additional personnel, teams or equipment for the time being.

The MIC has therefore put on stand-by its coordination and assessment team for the time being, which is ready to intervene immediately if need be.

One Commission humanitarian expert from is ready to join the UNDAC (United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination) mission if so requested by UNOCHA. Discussions and coordination are going on to find the best way to move forward.

## **Situation in Japan's nuclear plants**

Japan authorities have not asked for help, but the EU stands ready to provide help in case of a request.

The European Commission is getting information from the International Atomic Energy Agency on the situation in Japan on a regular basis.

To assess the Japanese situation and EU's state of preparedness in case of similar incidents, Commissioner Günther Oettinger has called a coordination meeting tomorrow, Tuesday 15 March at 14:00 in Brussels, with EU Energy Ministers, all 27 national nuclear safety authorities and all operators and vendors of nuclear power plants in the EU. The aim is to get first hand information on contingency plans and safety measures in place. This includes information on the controls done by national authorities, the safety requirements for earthquakes and emergency power supply systems for reactor cooling. Commissioner Oettinger will give first hand information to the European Parliament at the ITRE committee on Tuesday evening after the coordination meeting.

## **Member states and EU respective competence for nuclear safety**

With the EU Directive on Nuclear Safety, the EU has established a legal framework for the safety of nuclear power plants. It says that Member States shall provide for national rules, the licence of nuclear power plants and the safety supervision. This means that national safety authorities do the inspections of the nuclear power plants and check whether contingency plans and safety standards are in place. Member States have to set up and continuously improve national safety rules. The Directive (25/09/2009) makes the Safety Standards of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) partially legally binding and enforceable in the EU.

The EU is responsible for radiation protection and safeguards measures. Radiation protection aims to ensure the protection of the health of workers and the public against dangers from ionizing radiation. Our experts go to nuclear power plants and other places to check whether the Member States have established the facilities necessary to carry out continuous monitoring of radioactivity. Our safeguards experts control on the spot that special fissile materials are not diverted from their intended uses as declared. These control mechanisms are, inter alia, in place to rule out that uranium designed for civic purposes is used for building an atomic bomb.

## **Consular assistance**

Member States' consular offices in Japan are operating. Citizens are invited to contact their embassies and to follow the Japanese authorities' advice.

Most Member States are advising against non essential travel to Japan and in particular to the most affected areas of the country.