

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION IN CASES OF DISASTER

II

In its previous number, the International Review published general information on the first International Conference for the Prevention and Elimination of the Effects of Disasters which was held at Skopje from October 25 to 30, 1966 and at which the League and the ICRC were represented. We have received from the Yugoslav Red Cross the conclusions reached by that Conference which we now have pleasure in giving below.

Assignment of Responsibilities

1. Responsibility for prediction, prevention, emergency action and reconstruction in cases of natural calamities and other massive disasters in every country, rests with government authorities. It is essential that this responsibility be definitely established, in accordance with the resolution on disaster relief adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations at its 20th session on December 7, 1965 and that it be concretely embodied in national plans taking into account in each instance the political, administrative, economic structure and social conditions of the country.

All social elements—government and voluntary agencies, public services and individuals—have the duty of participating in the national plan in accordance with tasks assigned them and to the extent of their qualifications and material possibilities.

2. The national plan should assign to public service and social organizations definite tasks related to prediction and prevention of disasters and to emergency relief and reconstruction efforts. The

plan should provide for coordination of efforts in such a way as to assure rapid mobilization and full and efficient use of needed material and personnel resources.

Co-ordinated Action

3. To assure co-ordinated action, it is necessary in the first place that the national plan should establish centralized leadership. This leadership may be that of an individual or of an organized group, the choice in each case resting with the country itself.

4. The responsible national body should co-ordinate requests for, and offers of, relief in terms of personnel and of material and financial assistance. It should also be prepared to provide official information rapidly and accurately on the effects of a disaster and on developing conditions and needs.

5. In the spirit of international solidarity, it is desirable that help should be extended to developing countries in setting up national plans.

6. Whatever the form of leadership for planning of action and assignment of tasks, it is important that personnel at every level of organization should receive basic and practical instruction in periodic educational sessions.

Country Variables

7. In extending international relief, it is important that full consideration be given not only to the extent and nature of the catastrophe but also to the general cultural pattern and physical conditions in the affected area.

Therefore, it is recommended that international norms and standards be established with reference to the kinds of material goods, especially medical equipment and supplies, likely to be needed in emergencies in different countries. There should also be established an international warning system and means of rapid intercommunication in emergency situations.

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8. It is desirable that international co-operation, the development of which is indispensable, should be further facilitated by written agreements between contiguous and nearby countries with reference to action in disaster emergencies.

9. It is also desirable that co-operation among voluntary agencies which participate in international relief work should be still further developed.

Medico-Social Aspects

10. Health and social work agencies have a special importance because of their concern with saving of lives and protection of the health of disaster victims. Therefore, such agencies should be prepared to provide expert personnel, trained to carry on their work in disaster areas in close co-ordination with other personnel engaged in serving disaster victims.

11. It is important that instruction in medical and other care under emergency situations resulting from massive disasters should be incorporated into all medical and social work education.

12. It is desirable that educational campaigns on self-care and help to others in disaster situations should be conducted in all countries on a wide national scale to reach all citizens.

13. Health and social protection of disaster victims should be considered an integrated function of services designed for the protection of all citizens, only in this manner can co-ordinated effort among responsible agencies be ensured.

14. Health and social institutions, just as health and social services in general, voluntary and official, should provide adequate material conditions and personnel for protection of citizens in times of disaster. Within this framework, centers for emergency treatment should be organized in larger cities.

15. In addition to providing first aid for disaster victims, it is also of great importance promptly to provide housing, food and drinking water for the affected population.

16. Services relating to persons killed in massive disasters must be legally provided for in the total plan of action. Such services involve establishing the fact of death and the causes thereof, identification of the victims, and proper burial.

Earthquake Engineering

17. The principles of earthquake engineering should be applied in preparing appropriate technical regulations for construction work in all countries subject to earthquakes.

18. Steps should be taken to develop a network of modern seismic stations in all countries in seismic areas.

Protection from Floods

19. In relation to protection against flood damage, it is important that studies should be made of all potential sources, intensities, and directions of flow of waters which may reach damaging proportions, in order that adequate protective measures may be developed.

20. Construction of needed protective facilities should be planned and actually realized to the extent possible within the framework of the existing water economy.

21. In order to make certain of the effectiveness of protective facilities in times of danger, it is important that there should be set up efficient services for supervising and maintaining them.

22. In planning protective facilities, their dimensions should be determined with full regard for the extent and degree of protection feasible technically in times of floods.

23. Systematic guarding and control of high dams, in accordance with carefully prepared regulations, is an essential safety measure.

City Planning

24. In city planning, in addition to many other requirements, consideration should be given to means of protection against

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natural disasters. In so doing it is necessary to study all the ways in which protection can be provided at minimum cost through the application of modern principles of city planning. For example, thought should be given to arrangements which would help to solve housing and traffic problems in cases of disaster.

25. City planning, particularly in densely populated places in seismic areas, should be carried on with full regard for principles of earthquake engineering and for detailed seismic maps of the locality, as well as for other technical considerations, such as those relating to traffic control, types of construction, and heights of buildings.

26. For protection against the effects of seismic ocean waves, cyclones and volcanic eruptions, observation and warning systems should be organized where these do not exist. Furthermore, countries subject to these natural hazards should co-ordinate their protective measures.

27. In countries subject to these particular kinds of natural hazards, pertinent technical regulations should be formulated, where this has not been done, for guidance in all construction projects.

Research Activities

28. The development of scientific research on national and international levels, in connection with all problems arising as a result of natural catastrophes and their effects, is recommended, with special emphasis on the following :

Developing of institutes for broadening and intensifying knowledge pertaining to earthquakes and earthquake engineering, and for training experts in this field.

Constant improvement of technical regulations pertaining to construction in seismic areas.

Research in relation to floods, especially those caused by seismic and tidal waves, to high dams, and to protective facilities.

Research in the area of protection against fire hazards by proper architectural, construction and city planning measures, especially with relation to inspection and testing of building materials and methods.

Organized Protective Measures

29. The Conference considers that the effects of natural disasters in many countries have been much greater than they need have been if appropriate preventive measures had been inaugurated. Therefore, the Conference appeals to all voluntary international and national agencies to urge that, with the aim of eliminating or alleviating the effects of natural and other massive disasters, appropriate technical knowledge and skill be applied in organization of relief and preventive efforts.

Transportation and Communication

30. Experience to date in various countries has shown that transportation enterprises and companies have reacted in a variety of ways, in disaster situations, ranging from free transportation of emergency goods and passengers to operation on the basis of normal schedules and tariffs. At times transportation charges have mounted to a point not in accord with the generous efforts of the donor. Further, in some situations, transportation services have not been sufficiently rapid. Therefore, the Conference appeals to all national and international agencies to propose as follows in their respective countries :

a) that when these responsible agencies are called upon to provide relief in disaster situations they be given priority in the use of all means of the most rapid transportation, such as railroads, airplanes, helicopters, ships, and motor vehicles, with the aim of bringing materials, equipment, emergency goods, rescue personnel, etc., to the disaster area in the most rapid manner possible ; and

b) that transportation companies of every kind, as a humanitarian measure, provide in their tariffs either for free transportation in emergency situations or for services at the lowest possible rates.

Prefabricated Housing

31. Long years of experience in providing relief for disaster victims have shown that the most rapid means of putting substantial

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roofs over the heads of victims is the use of light-weight prefabricated construction materials. Therefore, the Conference recommends to all government and national and international voluntary agencies that the use of prefabricated elements be specified for construction and equipment of dwellings and other needed structures in disaster situations. In doing this, it should be kept in mind that all needed elements for completion of units should be provided, that they should be sent by the most rapid means, that they should be of a kind suited to the designated purposes and to prevailing weather and other conditions in the area where they will be assembled, and that undue costs or difficulty should not be involved in the assembling process or in maintenance of completed units. In delivering prefabricated materials, the donor should indicate whether they are designed for temporary or permanent structures.

Reserves for Relief

32. With the aim that relief materials may be quickly delivered in emergencies, the Conference recommends that all countries set up reserves of relief goods and materials in proximity to places potentially subject to natural disasters.

Future Meetings

In the interest of brotherly understanding among peoples and international solidarity, the Conference feels it highly desirable that there should be meetings of this kind from time to time for the further exchange of experiences and opinion relating to ways of preventing and alleviating the effects of natural and other massive disasters.
