

# M I S C E L L A N E O U S

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## ASSISTANCE IN NATURAL DISASTER AND OTHER EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

The United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), at its fifty-first session (Geneva, 5–30 July 1971), examined the question of “ Assistance in Natural Disaster and Other Emergency Situations ”. By 24 votes in favour, none against, and 2 abstentions, it adopted the resolution which we quote below.<sup>1</sup> ECOSOC’s decision is yet to be approved by the twenty-sixth session of the General Assembly. Contingent upon that approval, the Secretary-General will be invited to appoint a Co-ordinator of relief in disaster situations and to set up a permanent relief bureau to co-ordinate assistance by the United Nations and specialized institutions.

Representatives of the ICRC and of the League have, of course, closely followed ECOSOC’s work in this field.

### The Economic and Social Council

*Bearing in mind that throughout history natural disasters and emergency situations have inflicted heavy loss of life and property, touching every people and every country,*

*Being aware of the varying needs of nations experiencing such disorders which present new challenges for international co-operation,*

*Concerned over the ability of the international community to come to the aid of the countries in a disaster situation,*

*Recalling General Assembly resolutions 2435 (XXIII) and 2717 (XXV), “ Assistance in Cases of Natural Disaster ”,*

*Expressing appreciation for the Secretary-General’s comprehensive report (E/4994), and for its perceptive examination of all aspects of the question and taking note of the relevant passage in his statement to the Council of 5 July 1971,*

*Noting the study annexed to the Secretary-General’s report on the legal status of disaster units operating under the aegis of the United Nations,*

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<sup>1</sup> Res. 1612 (LI).

*Mindful of recent steps taken to improve evolving procedures in the United Nations system, voluntary agencies and individual Governments in the field of international disaster assistance,*

*Bearing in mind that assistance to meet the requests of the stricken countries without prejudice to their individual country programmes under the UNDP can be an effective contribution to the rehabilitation and development of the stricken areas,*

*Bearing in mind also that the possible response of the IBRD and other credit organizations and development agencies to a request from the Governments concerned for complementary assistance for the stricken areas, without prejudice to the assistance provided by these organizations for the normal development programmes of the stricken countries, can be an important element in the reconstruction and development of the stricken areas,*

*Noting the competence of the United Nations and its agencies, UNICEF, the World Food Programme, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to render assistance in disasters and other emergency situations,*

*Noting further the key role which the UNDP Resident Representatives should play at the country level,*

*Recognizing the vital roles in international relief of the International Red Cross and other voluntary societies,*

*Recognizing further the necessity to ensure prompt, effective and efficient response to a Government's need for assistance at the time of a natural disaster or other emergency situation that brings to bear the resources of the United Nations, prospective donor countries, and voluntary agencies,*

*1. Calls on the Secretary-General to appoint a Disaster Relief Co-ordinator who would report directly to him, and who would be authorized, on behalf of the Secretary-General, to:*

- (a) Mobilize, direct and co-ordinate the relief activities of the various organizations of the United Nations system in response to a request for disaster assistance from a stricken State;*
- (b) Receive on behalf of the Secretary-General contributions offered to him for disaster relief assistance for particular emergency situations to be carried out by the United Nations, its agencies and programmes;*

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- (c) *Co-ordinate United Nations assistance with assistance given by intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations ;*
- (d) *Assist the Government of the stricken country to assess relief and other needs and to evaluate the priority of these needs, to disseminate this information to prospective donors and others concerned and to serve as a clearing house for assistance extended or planned by all sources of external aid ;*
- (e) *Promote the study, prevention, control and prediction of natural disasters including the collection and dissemination of information concerning technological developments ;*
- (f) *Assist in providing advice to Governments on pre-disaster planning in association with relevant voluntary organizations, particularly with the League of Red Cross Societies, and draw upon United Nations resources available for such purposes ;*
- (g) *Acquire and disseminate information relevant to planning and co-ordinating relief for disasters including the improvement and establishment of stockpiles in disaster prone areas and prepare suggestions to ensure the most effective use of available resources ;*
- (h) *Phase out relief operations under his aegis as the stricken country moves into the stage of rehabilitation and reconstruction but continue to interest himself, within the framework of his responsibilities for relief, in the activities of the UN agencies concerned with rehabilitation and reconstruction ;*
- (i) *Prepare an annual report for the Secretary-General to be submitted to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly ;*

2. *Recommends that the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator be appointed by the Secretary-General normally for a term of five years ;*

3. *Endorses the Secretary-General's proposals for a small permanent office in the United Nations which shall be the focal point in the United Nations system for disaster relief matters ;*

4. *Recommends that this office be headed by the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, be a distinct element within the United Nations Secretariat, and be augmented as necessary by short-term secondment of personnel for individual emergencies ;*

5. Requests the Secretary-General to prepare a study for its 53rd session taking into account any relevant suggestions and the experience gained by the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator, on ways and means to enable the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator adequately to perform the functions entrusted to him under this resolution ;

6. Further endorses the plan for a roster of volunteers to be drawn from experienced staff members of the United Nations system and interested non-governmental organizations who could be made available at very short notice ;

7. Recommends that the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator should maintain contact with the Governments of States members of the United Nations and of the specialized agencies and the IAEA concerning available aid in emergency situations such as food supplies, medicines, personnel, transportation, communications, as well as advice to countries in pre-disaster planning and preparedness ;

8. Invites potential recipient governments,

- (a) to establish disaster contingency plans with appropriate assistance from the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator,
- (b) to appoint a single National Disaster Relief Co-ordinator to facilitate the receipt of international aid in times of an emergency ;
- (c) to establish stockpiles of emergency supplies such as tents, blankets, medicine and non-perishable foodstuffs ;
- (d) to consider appropriate legislative or other measures to facilitate the receipt of aid, including overflight and landing rights and necessary privileges and immunities for relief units ;
- (e) to improve national disaster warning systems ;

9. Invites potential donor governments :

- (a) to respond promptly to any call by the Secretary-General or by the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator on his behalf ;
- (b) to consider and to continue offering on a wider basis emergency assistance in disaster situations ;
- (c) to inform the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator in advance about the facilities and services they might be in a position to provide immediately including where possible relief units, logistical support and means of effective communications ;

10. Further invites *all organizations of the United Nations system and all other organizations involved to co-operate with the Disaster Relief Co-ordinator* ;

11. Recommends *that the General Assembly at its twenty-sixth session endorse the foregoing proposals and recommendations.*

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### **The Neutrality of a XVII Century Field Hospital**

*Général-major médecin E. Evrard, whose article on aero-medical evacuation in war-time was published recently in the International Review has now written a well documented study on the neutrality of a field hospital in the XVIIth century.<sup>1</sup> As, according to him, this was the first time a field hospital was granted neutral status, we believe our readers will be interested in the facts and author's comments contained in the following extract :*

In her fascinating study, published in 1959, entitled " Le service sanitaire de l'armée espagnole des Pays-Bas à la fin du XVI<sup>e</sup> et au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle ", Miss Lucienne van Meerbeeck, conservator of the General Archives of the Kingdom of Belgium, relates the following episode:

" In 1677, a French military hospital abandoned in the middle of the war in one of our provinces was placed under the safeguard of the Netherlands' Governor General and guaranteed protection jointly by the coats of arms of the kings of France and Spain."

Miss Meerbeck referred to the letter written on August 23, 1677, in the Thieu Camp, in the name of Charles II of Spain, by the Governor General of the Netherlands, the Duke of Villa-Hermosa, promising protection to the French military hospital at Marchienne-au-Pont, in the Hainaut region. The original draft of this letter is

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<sup>1</sup> Special issue of *Revue internationale des services de santé des armées de terre, de mer et de l'air*, Paris 1967.