

**TWENTY-SIXTH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
OF THE RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT**

Budapest, November-December 1991

**RED CROSS AND RED CRESCENT RESPONSE
TO NATURAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL DISASTERS
ROLE OF THE LEAGUE IN NATURAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL
DISASTER REDUCTION**

**(Item 4.1 on the provisional agenda of the
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**Document drawn up
by
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The Role of the League in Natural and Technological Disaster Reduction.

Introduction

This paper deals only with natural disasters and technological disasters in times of peace.

The ideals and goals expressed in the League's Strategic Work-plan for the 90s emphasise the need for the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to target their assistance to the most vulnerable. To render such principles workable, a more direct expression is needed which relates these ideals to the reality of the work we do. Further, as the Federation expands, meets new challenges and assists an increasing number of people, standards have to be set against which we can judge our efforts. For our disaster related work, we need a common understanding of the Red Cross and Red Crescent approach in prevention, preparedness and response.

The League defines disasters as extreme events which outstrip the capacities of communities, or certain sections of communities, to cope with them. Disasters occur because of the interaction of extreme events and processes - both natural and man-made - with vulnerable people. Therefore, in disaster prevention, preparedness and response the League's focus and that of National Societies, is on vulnerable people. We define "vulnerable people" as those at risk from situations that threaten their lives or long term well-being and who have least capacity to cope with the immediate effects of stress or to achieve sustainable recovery from it.

The purpose of our interventions is to respond to people's immediate needs and to reduce their vulnerability so as to cause a sustainable increase in the long term welfare of the affected population and reduce their risk to future disasters.

Vulnerability to disasters often results from underlying chronic problems of poverty, disempowerment, and inequitable development.

These beliefs lead to the following guidelines for disaster prevention & preparedness.

Prevention & Preparedness

In disaster prevention and preparedness the League aims both to strengthen the capacity of National Societies to respond in a timely and effective manner when disaster strikes and to work, through National Societies, with vulnerable groups in an effort to reduce their vulnerability to future disasters.

Vulnerability

When we say that in our disaster preparedness and response, we aim to assist the most vulnerable, we must start to think beyond our traditional concepts of the aged and infirm. An analysis of who is vulnerable and, as importantly, why they are vulnerable, is critical if we are to target our aid to those most in need and deliver it in such a fashion so as to reduce vulnerability, not just maintain the status quo.

Tackling vulnerability to disasters, whether it is caused by poverty and inequality, environmental degradation, or degenerating social and man-made structures, is as important to disaster reduction as predicting earthquakes, reinforcing flood barriers and building cyclone shelters.

Preparedness

Preparedness involves both preparing our ability as an organisation to react in times of disaster and carrying out pre-disaster activities with the potential victims to reduce their vulnerability.

Readying ourselves for action is the classic approach to preparedness. There are three levels at which we must prepare for action; at the branch, the national and the international level.

Branch level

Branch level activities are the bedrock of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Here, disaster preparedness must be part of the normal branch development activities. Disaster preparedness should be part of first-aid training and part of normal branch development. It is based on a strategy of uncovering the causes of vulnerability and then evolving branch level development strategies to tackle them.

National level

At the national level National Societies have a duty to assist their governments in formulating National Disaster Response Plans. National Societies should seek to become members of committees formed to implement these plans. They should use their good offices to make sure that the plans take due recognition of the expected needs of the victims and the need to use relief aid to reduce future vulnerability to disasters.

A phenomena of disaster relief, for which the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies have a particular need to prepare is the sudden influx of foreign NGOs. The Principles and Rules for Disaster Relief (adopted at the XX1st International Conference of the Red Cross), stress the need for information-sharing and operations coordination, but need to be translated into practical actions in the field.

Coordination problems exist on three levels; at the disaster site, at the national level and internationally. In most disasters, it is the national level which seems to have the worst problems, and, as always, it is the disaster victims who end up bearing the burden of those problems.

There may well be a role for National Societies to act to assist the victims, the host government and the NGO community by providing information gathering, analysis and dissemination services, in times of disaster, upon which cooperative NGO action can be based. This concept is more fully dealt with in the paper on coordination in times of disaster which has also been represented to this Commission.

International Level

At the international level the League's Secretariat in Geneva has a vital role to play in preparing itself to help channel the necessary resources from the Federation to the National Society faced with a major disaster response. We have to ensure that the mechanisms for calling forward this assistance and ensuring that it is delivered in a timely and appropriate fashion, are in place. One of these mechanisms is the Principles and Rules for Disaster Relief.

The Secretariat also has a role to play in sharing what might be termed "best practice" within the League. If we have, from one country or another, excellent examples of Red Cross principles being put into practice in disaster preparedness, the Secretariat must find ways of making this experience available to all members.

Outside of the Red Cross Movement, the Secretariat also has a role to play in terms of the international advocacy needed to keep the plight of the World's most vulnerable, and the causes of that vulnerability, centre stage. We have a duty to speak out on their behalf.

Relief and Rehabilitation

Disaster reduction is not simply a matter of reducing the occurrence of disasters, it also entails reducing the magnitude and longevity of their effects. In this context, effective disaster relief and rehabilitation are also disaster reduction strategies.

Basic to the Red Cross and Red Crescent relief approach is the assertion that the effect of a disaster needs to be measured both in terms of what happens at the time of the disaster and how quickly people recover from it. Our relief work is both about supplying basic needs and rebuilding sustainable livelihoods, i.e. reducing vulnerabilities. Relief and rehabilitation, therefore, become inseparable.

In disaster relief the League's programmes are governed by two objectives.

A) To provide timely, appropriate and effective relief aimed at providing for the immediate life supporting needs of the disaster victims.

B) To provide this relief in such a fashion that it reduces future vulnerability to disaster.

Thus both the relief delivered and the process by which it is delivered are important.

Timeliness is a product of the rapidity and accuracy of our needs assessment, linked to the speed with which we are able to deliver relief supplies (personal, cash, goods-in-kind).

In disaster rehabilitation, the League's prime objective is to reduce, in a sustainable fashion, vulnerability to future disasters. Planning, both for rehabilitation and the phasing out of emergency relief, must take place right from the start of a relief operation, and not just be included as an afterthought.

IDNDR

Many of the League's activities naturally fall within the remit of IDNDR. The League has been encouraging its members to participate, at the National Level in IDNDR committees. At the international level, the League has been promoting the concept of disaster reduction through vulnerability reduction. This is done through its regular publications and through planned joint publications with leading academic and disaster response agencies.

In November 1990, the League organised a major consultation on the Health aspects of IDNDR. This was held at Annecy (France) and attended by many National Societies as well as the IDNDR Secretariat and WHO. The recommendations from that meeting are attached as appendix 1.

A further contribution to IDNDR was made in April 1991 when the League played a key role in formulating the Tampere Declaration on Disaster Communications (see appendix 2.) This declaration, arising out of an international conference held in Tampere, Finland, paves the way for the freer use of telecommunications equipment in times of disaster so as to enhance the effectiveness of disaster relief.

Study on the Role of the National Societies in Technical and Industrial Disasters and Accidents.

This study was called for in resolution XXI of the XXVth International Conference of the Red Cross, held in Geneva 1986. A report on the progress of this study is attached as appendix 3.

Appendix I

Consultation on Health Aspects of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR)

THE RED CROSS/RED CRESCENT CONTRIBUTION

Annecy, France, 4 - 7 November 1990

RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The health aspects of disaster preparedness and response are an essential component of Primary Health Care and should therefore, be integrated with PHC programmes. IDNDR provides an important opportunity to strengthen and develop the PHC/CBHP activities of National Societies, their infrastructure and capacity (technical and management) and their focus on vulnerable families and communities living in disaster-prone areas. For the purposes of this consultation, "health" comprises physical, mental and social well-being and includes nutrition and environmental health.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is a need to clarify the health components of disaster preparedness and response and to ensure that First Aid programmes focus on these priority health needs of disaster affected communities. This will necessitate re-orientation, adaptation and development of existing First Aid programmes in order to respond to local emergency health needs.
2. There continues to be a great need for information about the health priorities of disaster preparedness and response, for the general public, for the media, for politicians and policy makers and also for the technical staff of National Societies responsible for disaster preparedness and response including case studies and recent developments.
3. It will be essential to develop training materials and training programmes (including follow-up) in order to strengthen the technical capacity of National Societies, and consideration should also be given to how the League could contribute to the disaster preparedness and response component of the basic training of nurses, paramedical staff and doctors.

4. There is a need for policy development and guidelines in relation to the management of medical supplies and the provision of medical supplies for sudden impact disasters; the health aspects of the recovery/rehabilitation phase of disaster response; initial assessments, monitoring and evaluation; and practical, operational tools from research findings.
5. In order to strengthen the capacity of National Societies, the Regional Technical Advisory system should be strengthened and plans developed to ensure that by the end of the decade each National Society has a health advisor with training and experience in disaster preparedness and response. In addition there should be an increased focus on implementing health programmes in response to long-term disasters as a means of strengthening and developing National Societies.
6. There is a continuing need to strengthen international, regional and national cooperation/collaboration with other NGOs, with the ICRC and with UN specialist agencies, particularly WHO, in order to develop advocacy and activities in relation to the health component of disaster preparedness and response.
7. In order to develop appropriate IDNDR related activities clear responsibilities should be identified at national, regional and international levels; National Societies should be encouraged to become members of national IDNDR Committees with a specific mandate to emphasize the health component of IDNDR and the important role of NGOs in the decade; and regional reviews/inventories of National Societies' activities in relation to the health aspects of disaster preparedness and response should be carried out as a baseline for the development of IDNDR activities.
8. Recommend to the Secretary General to draw up a detailed strategic plan and budget for the health aspects of IDNDR, based on the above recommendations and integrated with other IDNDR developments and activities of the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, and to seek financial, human and other resources in order to support the implementation of this strategic plan.

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Appendix II

TEXT OF THE TAMPERE DECLARATION ON DISASTER COMMUNICATIONS

22 May 1991, Tampere, Finland

PURPOSE

1. The group of experts in communications and disaster management participating in the Conference on Disaster Communications held at Tampere, Finland, from 20-22 May 1991, declare that there is an urgent need to improve international co-operation in communications and enhance national communications capabilities in order to reduce loss of life, damage to property and livelihoods, and damage to the environment caused by disasters. For the purpose of this Declaration disasters are viewed as extreme occurrences which outstrip the ability of an affected society to cope with them. Behind these events often lie chronic problems stemming from the interaction of natural, environmental and man-made factors. In this regard the Tampere Conference welcomes the proposal for a Pilot UN Centre for Urgent Environmental Assistance (Agenda Item No. 4) to be considered at the 16th Governing Council Session of the UN Environment Programme, Nairobi, 20 to 31 May 1991.

2. The Tampere Conference reiterates the primary responsibility of national authorities for disaster management and communications. The supportive role of international organizations in disaster management is highlighted. The Conference also recognizes the important role played by indigenous and international non-governmental organizations in disaster mitigation and relief.

3. The Tampere Conference recognizes that disasters have killed millions of people over the past twenty years alone and caused massive financial and other damage to people, property and the environment. Such disasters will continue to occur frequently around the globe, with particularly devastating consequences in the developing countries. Further efforts are required to prevent such disasters and alleviate their consequences.

4. The Tampere Conference stresses that improved flows of international information through telecommunication technologies, including satellite and broadcasting, can assist in the prediction, monitoring and early warning necessary to prevent some of the

consequences and reduce the impact of such disasters once they have occurred. There is an urgent need to improve the nature, scope and quality of information being transmitted internationally, including its validity, significance, accuracy and timeliness.

5. The critical role of the mass media in providing public information services to communities at risk is recognized, as is their broader role in education and opinion-forming, particularly with regard to slow-onset disasters.

6. Terrestrial and satellite communications, including established international satellite networks, and remote-sensing technologies have played, and will continue to play, major roles in reducing the devastating effects of disasters by dramatically improving hazard identification and risk assessment, disaster preparedness, monitoring, early warning and onset and post-disaster relief operations. These facilities are, in practice, not universally accessible, particularly in developing countries where such disasters most frequently occur.

7. Communication links are almost always disabled and disrupted during the first hours of a major disaster. When disaster strikes, there is an urgency to establish effective and comprehensive communication links at the disaster site, between the site and the national systems for dealing with disaster response, and with the concerned international community.

8. The Tampere Conference endorses the Preamble and Major Needs identified and the Recommendations adopted at the UNDRO International Conference on Disaster Communications on 21 March 1990 and held in the context of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR).

9. The Tampere Conference calls for the development of a convention on Disaster Communications as elaborated further below and to be negotiated not later than 1993. This Convention should be viewed in the context of a future comprehensive accord on disaster management.

10. The Tampere Conference recognizes the urgent communications needs generated by emergency disaster relief and the longer-term needs of disaster mitigation.

COMMUNICATIONS IN DISASTER RELIEF

11. Present limitations to disaster communications include:

- (a) organizational barriers which impede the flow of information among the various elements of the international disaster response network.

- (b) uncertainty over the availability and location of communications equipment which could be made accessible for disaster use.
- (c) regulatory barriers which slow down the importation and operation of communications equipment.
- (d) high costs which inhibit the effective use of communications equipment during disasters.

12. In order to overcome these barriers a convention on Disaster Communications should, at a minimum:

- (a) establish an effective framework for co-operation between and among State parties, intergovernmental and regional groupings and entities, and non-governmental bodies, including international terrestrial and satellite telecommunications operating organizations and relevant commercial sector organizations.
- (b) further improve the co-ordination of international disaster management.
- (c) ensure the utilization to the maximum extent of existing global, regional and national terrestrial and satellite communications networks; encourage the immediate availability at national, regional and international centres of communications equipment; and encourage the development of the amateur radio services and their application to disaster communications.
- (d) encourage national authorities to establish an inventory and/or data base of their own communications equipment and resources relevant to disaster relief, national regulations to ensure access to them, and an appropriate national preparedness plan for their effective use.
- (e) encourage UNDRO, within the framework of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, to maintain an international inventory of communications equipment and resources and to invite national governments, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and other relevant entities to make their own communications equipment and resources information available.
- (f) encourage improved and enhanced national and international training programmes to develop the necessary expertise in the rapidly-evolving field of disaster communications, and the further consideration of the communications issue in disaster management training programmes.

(g) facilitate the rapid dissemination and effective use of communications equipment and resources by limiting, reducing and, where possible, removing regulatory barriers, including:

- Customs clearance procedures and duties.
- Restrictions on possession and use.
- Inappropriate restrictions on the dissemination of existing and new technical information.
- The need for type-approval procedures and operating licences, including simplification.
- National rules concerning the temporary assignment of appropriate radio frequencies.

(h) establish appropriate further rules relating to matters as:

- Entry, exit and transit for personnel, equipment and property.
- Direction and control of assistance.
- Confidentiality of information.
- Privileges, immunities and facilities.
- Claims and compensation.

(i) establish the basis for an appropriate tariff structure for domestic and international communications carriers, including waiver of charges where appropriate, and the necessary philosophy and approach to payment for communications services required in disaster relief efforts.

COMMUNICATIONS IN DISASTER MITIGATION

13. Effective early warning systems and comprehensive data bases are limited by the unequal access to communications technology, software and expertise.

14. The proposed Convention should, at a minimum, establish mechanisms for international co-operation in the use of terrestrial and satellite telecommunications technologies in the prediction, monitoring and early warning of disasters, especially the early dissemination of information to those in the at-risk communities.

THE WAY FORWARD

15. The Tampere Conference recommends that no later than 1993 an intergovernmental conference be convened under the auspices of UNDRO to prepare for the negotiation of an International Convention on Disaster Communications to establish appropriate mechanisms to improve international co-operation. This conference should be complementary to envisaged intergovernmental action to facilitate the use of communications equipment for disaster relief and to the global meeting of IDNDR National Committees proposed for 1993.
16. To carry through the above suggestions—the enhancement and improvement of disaster communication—will require a realistic financial commitment from the international community, including governments, international organizations, donor organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.
17. The proposed Convention should take account of existing provisions and proposals, including Resolution No. 209 (Mob-87) of the World Administrative Radio Conference for the Mobile Services, Geneva, 1987, on the Study and Implementation of a Global Land and Maritime Distress and Safety System.
18. The development of the proposed Convention on Disaster Communication should be co-ordinated by UNDRO, in co-operation with the ITU and other relevant organizations, including international terrestrial and satellite telecommunications operating organizations.
19. Recognizing that the development of such a Convention will take time, the Tampere Conference calls upon all States to consider urgent measures to give effect to the provisions of this Declaration on an interim unilateral or bilateral basis for general humanitarian reasons.
20. The Tampere Conference recommends that, consistent with the goals and objectives of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, the UN Disaster Relief Co-ordinator should take the appropriate steps to implement the intent of this Declaration with the support of, and in consultation with, other concerned bodies of the UN system, international terrestrial and satellite telecommunications operating organizations and non-governmental organizations.
21. The Tampere Conference recommends that this Declaration be circulated to governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, and in appropriate international fora, such as the November 1991 International Red Cross Conference and the June 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, and be

considered in the relevant activities of concerned organizations and institutions at the international, regional and national levels.

22. The Tampere Conference expresses its gratitude to the Government of Finland and the City of Tampere for hosting the Conference; to the International Institute of Communications for convening it; to the Aamuhleti Group Ltd. and The Annenberg Washington Program in Communications Policy Studies of Northwestern University for their support; to UNDRO, the ITU, UNHCR, WMO, WHO and the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies for their support; to the Finnish Post and Telecommunications, the Center for Public Service Communications, and the Centre for International Environmental Law for their assistance; and to all those present for their participation.

Appendix III

**PROGRESS REPORT ON THE STUDY ON THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL
SOCIETIES IN TECHNICAL AND OTHER DISASTERS**

The XXVth International Red Cross Conference (Geneva, 1986) adopted Resolution XXI in which it acknowledged "the fact that the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is more especially obliged to provide mutual assistance and support in any kind of disaster" and recognized "the necessity for the Movement to address itself more comprehensively and more intensively than up to now to the issue of possible dangers and consequences of technical and other disasters with a view to more adequate and improved assistance".

The Conference adopted several recommendations addressed to governments, international organizations, National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and recommended "that the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the Henry Dunant Institute undertake a study concerning the possibilities and necessities of improved assistance from the Movement in case of technical and other disasters and that the result of this study be reported to the next Conference".

According to the mandate of the XXVth Conference, the study should respond to the basic question: What is the role of the National Societies in the event of technical and other disasters and what are the possibilities and necessities of improved assistance from the Movement.

On 22 January 1990, representatives of several National Societies (Germany, Finland, USSR, USA), the League and Henry Dunant Institute met in Geneva and suggested that the League and the Institute should

- examine and identify the concrete forms of action of the National Societies in favour of the victims of technical disasters and accidents.
- assess and determine the role of the National Societies in relation to the action of other institutions: governmental institutions and in particular of the civil defence, other organizations and institutions.
- make recommendations to the Movement as a whole and to the National Societies in particular in relation to their role in humanitarian assistance to the victims of technical disasters and accidents.

The Final report will include:

I. General problematics of technical and other disasters: definition of the disasters and situation of technical disasters in relation to others.

II. Measures undertaken by the League and Henry Dunant Institute:
a) Questionnaire

b) Analysis and presentation of the results of the questionnaire

III. Technical disasters and preparation organized by other institutions (on the national and international levels, UNDRO, WHO etc.

IV. Proposals for the future activity.

The Working group of the League and the Institute in co-operation with the ICRC prepared a questionnaire which was sent to 50 National Societies. We shall be delighted to send this questionnaire to other Societies which may be interested in this type of disaster.

As of the 15 July 1991, we have received 18 responses to the questionnaire, and responses are still arriving. These will act as a background for the preparation of the final study. We have summarized the information received and made comparisons between disaster preparedness of the different countries for both natural and technical disasters. We have also attempted to identify gaps in the existing disaster preparedness programmes of the National Societies. This will be included in the final report, to be published in 1992. Both the League and Henry Dunant Institute have made suggestions about the role each feels that it can play in improving the disaster preparedness of the Movement.

The size and importance of the study requested by the XXVth International Conference represents also a cost in human resources, work, documentation and publication. We hope that this study can contribute to better prevention and preparedness of the National Societies and will contribute to the reduction of victims' and elimination of the consequences of technical and other disasters and accidents. The study was undertaken until now thanks to the contributions received from the Japanese Red Cross, the ICRC, the League and the Henry Dunant Institute. We shall very much appreciate it if other National Societies, governments, international organizations and foundations could make contributions to the realization of the final study.