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VIIIth SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE LEAGUE

Budapest, 25-27 November 1991

Item 11 of the Agenda

REPORT OF THE DISASTER RELIEF COMMISSION

Geneva, 23 September 1991

SUMMARY

The number of vulnerable people, and hence the number of disaster victims is increasing. New non-governmental organisations as well as governments themselves are becoming increasingly interested in disaster response. During the last 2 years the League and its National Societies have responded to a large number of disasters. Disaster preparedness has clearly been shown to pay in a number of cases. The Secretariat capacity has increased. However, the overall effectiveness of the League Federation has been less than it could or should be. National Societies in developing countries and especially in disaster-prone developing countries need increasing disaster preparedness and development support. Increased confidence within the Movement is needed to maximise the use of the total resources of the Movement following a major disaster. Recommendations on the Role of the League in Coordination in Disasters, on Disaster Response Strategy, and on the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund are presented.

The Changing Context of Disasters

During its meetings the Commission has been aware of and has discussed the rapidly changing context of disaster relief. Some of the key elements of this are summarised below:

1. There have been a very large number of disasters in the last 2 years with increasing numbers of disaster victims as a result of the increasing number of vulnerable people in the world.
2. There is a greater awareness of disasters throughout the world as a result of the increasing pace and power of communications and communicated images.
3. The number of NGOs based in developed as well as developing countries is increasing. Some of these have developed more aggressive philosophies than the Red Cross and make more effective use of the media.
4. The problems of coordination in disaster situations have consequently increased. There is a need to address this to maximise the effectiveness of action as well as maximising the donor understanding and support.
5. There is increasing interest on the part of donor governments and institutions in disaster relief. Present ideas in this debate vary from proposals to improve the effectiveness of the UN's disaster response structure, to create a new European Community disaster response organisation, to increased use of national governmental disaster response teams.

6. Somewhat related to the above and partly as a consequence of the end of the "cold war" there is increasing interest in the potential for the use of the logistic capacity of the military in disaster response. This is not a new phenomenon. Military logistics have been used at the national level and international level over many years. The scale of this involvement has grown rapidly however.
7. Thinking about effective disaster response has become more donor orientated. There is a tendency for developed countries to stress the importance of the international dimension of disaster relief and to underestimate the importance of disaster preparedness and of the response of national organisations. Media attention which follows international teams tends to magnify this effect. Local organisations - Red Cross/Red Crescent - or others, even where strong and capable, struggle to be "seen" in the transmitted images of disaster response. This reinforces the impression that it is the international action which is critical to success in disaster response.

Achievements and Problems Faced

In its work the Commission has looked back at past recommendations of the Disaster Relief Commission and has taken the Strategic Work Plan of the League as a further guide for its work. The Disaster Relief Commission has noted with considerable satisfaction, the increasing capacity of the Secretariat during the two years. A number of specific steps foreseen in the Strategic Work Plan have been undertaken

- the establishment of an Appeals and Reports Service,
- the preparation of Operational Procedures,
- the strengthening of the Logistics Service,
- increased use of operational evaluations,
- increased publication of field work and, most recently,
- the creation of the Disaster Policy Department.

There are other areas, including the review of the League's regional warehouses and its use of telecommunications where good progress has been made but considerable further work is needed. The Commission noted with satisfaction the League's continued involvement in the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) and the substantial progress that has been made on the evaluation of the Federation's involvement in relief and rehabilitation work in Armenia following the earthquake of 1988.

In reviewing operations, the Commission noted that as a result of the high number of disasters, the League and National Societies have undertaken a very large number of relief operations during the period. To give an example, from January 1991 up to the time of the Relief Commission's meeting, 40 relief appeals have been launched to assist a total of 5.3 million disaster victims and requiring support in the amount of almost CHF 250 million. The League today is undertaking a large number of operations, many of them very long term. The number of League delegations has increased, and in general the support from donors has been positive although there have been operations which for one reason or another, have not been fully funded.

Another important observation from the review of operations is that in cases where significant investment has been made in disaster preparedness, the results have been evident. The most evident examples during the past two years have been in Iran (the 1990 earthquake and the refugees) and in Bangladesh (the 1991 cyclone).

Two difficulties which have been apparent in some cases have been:

- (a) the speed with which the Red Cross/Red Crescent nationally and internationally has been able to respond
- (b) imbalances of resources in relation to needs.

With regard to the first of these, namely speed of response, there have been problems in that in some cases a National Society has lacked the capacity to provide a sufficient first response with its own resources. In a number of cases this has then been compounded by the fact that the effective mobilisation of international assistance from within the Movement, has been hampered by procedural sensitivities either between the National Society and the League or between the League and ICRC.

With regard to the second, namely, the issue of imbalance of resources, there have been cases where it has not been possible for the National Society to respond fully to the needs of disaster victims because of inadequate support. This often occurs in slow onset disasters where there is insufficient public awareness to mobilise support. A second opposite problem with resources has occurred where a large disaster has attracted a very strong support and the capacity of the National Society has not been sufficient to enable this support to be rapidly and effectively used.

Challenges of the Future

Two things stand out from what has been said above. Firstly, there will continue to be large, probably increasing, numbers of disaster victims needing Red Cross/Red Crescent assistance. Secondly, the context for Red Cross/Red Crescent action is changing fast. New actors, both in non-government and governmental are entering the disaster relief scene.

The Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement cannot deal with these challenges of increased numbers of people in need or of increased competition through any other strategy than increasing the effectiveness of its own action. Analysis and discussion are necessary but not enough.

The increased response of the Red Cross/Red Crescent must be based on a more effective use of its global network of National Societies matched by no other non-governmental organisation. This provides the potential of trained and equipped teams, well resourced, understanding the culture of operation, able to respond immediately, and before the international teams, and able to call on the support of an international federation.

Where National Societies in disaster prone countries are prepared and resourced to deal with disasters, they have proved time and again that the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement can respond faster and more effectively than anyone else. Too often however one or both of the problems identified above intervene. Namely, either the National Society is not strong enough to make a sufficient initial response or the subsequent action and involvement of the full capacity of the International Red Cross Movement becomes delayed through the need to regulate procedural niceties.

These items, these issues, must stay high on the Movement's agenda and in particular, the Movement must find the way to make

- (a) increased commitment to disaster preparedness and development of National Societies in the Third World, and in particular, in disaster prone areas
- (b) new initiatives to develop greater confidence and more rapid working procedures to enable the full use of the capacity of the Federation in time of disaster.

The Commission will keep these items on its agenda for future meetings. At present the Commission presents the following specific recommendations to the General Assembly.

Recommendations

In the light of the above, the Disaster Relief Commission has three specific recommendations to the General Assembly.

The first of these addresses the issue of the coordination needed between non-governmental organisations and is entitled "The Role of the National Societies and the League in Coordination of International Relief Efforts". It is presented here in the form of a draft resolution with a short note of explanation (Annex I), prepared by the Secretariat which the Commission urges the General Assembly to accept and forward to the International Conference for endorsement.

The second of the recommendations is entitled "Disaster Response Strategy from Preparedness through Relief to Rehabilitation" which reiterates the policy framework within which the Federation should respond to disasters. (The recommendation with a short note of explanation is attached as Annex II).

The third of these entitled "Disaster Relief Emergency Fund" proposes a modification in the rules of the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund to enable the Fund to be used for preparation as well as implementation of disaster relief assistance. (The original text and the new version, with the proposed changes highlighted, is attached as Annex III)

ANNEX I

The Role of the National Societies and the League in Coordination of International Relief Efforts.

The Principles and Rules for Disaster Relief, which govern the actions of the League and National Societies in times of disaster, provide a framework for achieving coordination of Red Cross/Red Crescent efforts.

We are seeking to provide a service which will enhance the effectiveness of NGO relief to disaster victims and will be of value to both the NGO and the Donor/Host Government community. The aim of the exercise is to facilitate coordination not to control operations.

Why there is a need for better coordination of NGOs.

The number and diversity of international and national NGOs becoming involved in disaster relief is on the increase. This is partly driven by a shift, in many countries, whereby the welfare needs of the poorest and most vulnerable are being passed on to the voluntary sector by government. It is also driven by the increased number of disasters and the greater numbers of people being effected. Another influential trend is the increased willingness of donor governments to channel their relief aid through their national NGOs. For some NGOs this has led to a clear linkage between the delivery of emergency disaster relief and the acquisition of large scale government funding. For some, the imperative to act may take on a financial as well as humanitarian face.

This plethora of diverse agencies, variously equipped and skilled has lead in the past to the inefficient use of relief resources. Lack of clarity over relief needs lead to inappropriate items being supplied. Some items may be over supplied, others under supplied. On the ground, the less public and more difficult areas of assistance may be neglected as agencies unwittingly gravitate to the "media high-ground".

For many governments, faced with a sudden influx of foreign relief workers, the NGO phenomena is a perplexing one. Are these organisations to be treated like donor governments, or UN agencies? Who do the NGOs represent, by what right are they offering assistance? How does a government create a mechanism for dealing with such a diverse collection of organisations? Many governments find themselves confronted with these management issues at the same time as trying to deal with the crisis of the disaster which has struck their country.

And of course, underneath all this complexity are the disaster victims. Are they getting the best deal possible out of the NGO community? Are their wishes, aspirations and needs being responded to?

The Role of the National Societies and the League.

The continuity provided by the long term presence of local National Societies linked through an international federation to a central Secretariat provides an ideal structure for aiding coordination both at the national and international level. It allows the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to be involved in disaster preparedness and rehabilitation after disasters, not just in emergency relief. As an indigenous organisation, the National Societies (in donor and host countries) are in a trusted position with their governments. The League, is a senior and respected member of the international NGO community.

Coordination through Facilitation, not Control.

The key is information quality. No NGO is going to easily let another NGO direct its operations - nor should it - but, if all NGOs are working from the same agreed needs assessment, all know each others capacities on the ground, are aware of the organisational framework within which they must work, and all know how the relief operation is progressing, they are more likely to work in a coherent manner.

It is suggested therefore that, in times of major disasters (defined here as those disasters where the League is called upon to provide assistance), in addition to its normal activities, the League should supply resources (Delegate plus necessary equipment) to the affected National Society to help with the following tasks.

- 1) Assisting government with the registration of incoming NGOs. (this could be as simple as providing an example of the sort of registration form that could be used).
- 2) Regularly gathering and making available needs-assessment information, using disaster site, government and NGO sources.
- 3) Producing regular updates on which NGOs are doing what where.
- 4) Updates on outstanding needs.
- 5) Providing information to incoming NGOs on government regulations, local customs etc that they will need to be aware of.
- 6) Providing government with a channel through which they can easily access the NGO community.

This will require the investment of resources, not just by the League at the time of the disaster, but before hand. National Societies in disaster prone countries would need to be prepared to take on such a role and to do some of the ground work for it, particularly with regard to points 5 and 6 above. If the League is to be effective in this task, it must be timely in its application. The need for clear, unbiased and consistent information is present from the very beginning of a relief operation. The League must be able to make its services available to National Societies of disaster affected countries within hours rather than days of a disaster striking.

Draft Resolution

Coordination of Non Governmental Disaster Relief

The XXVIth International Conference of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies,

Noting with satisfaction the growing governmental and non-governmental humanitarian response to international disaster relief operations,

Aware of the responsibility of the recognised relief agencies to promote information, cooperation and coordination in case of international disaster response operations,

Recalling Resolution No. XVII adopted at the XXth International Red Cross Conference in Vienna in 1965 about planning and coordination of international relief actions,

Referring to the Principles and Rules for Disaster Relief adopted by the XXIst International Conference of the Red Cross in Istanbul 1969, amended by the XXIInd International Conference in Teheran 1973, by the XXIIIRD International Conference in Bucharest 1977 and by the XXIVth International Conference in Manila 1981,

Reaffirming especially Resolution No. VI and Annex adopted at the XXIVth International Conference in Bucharest 1977 as well as Resolution No. XXVI adopted at the XXIst International Conference in Istanbul 1969,

Stressing again the function of the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to act as the permanent body of liaison, coordination and information exchange between the National Societies, in accordance with the Principles and Rules for Disaster Relief,

Remembering Resolution No. VII adopted at the XXIInd International Conference in Teheran 1973 requesting the League, the ICRC and National Societies to maintain and further strengthen their association with UNDRO with a view of effecting closer cooperation and coordination in the field of relief assistance in cases of disaster, including also other specialised UN agencies.

Recognising that Governments of countries prone to natural disasters are increasingly acknowledging the important roles played by national and international voluntary relief agencies in times of disaster and are further strengthening their mechanisms for effectively utilising international NGO relief,

Recognising the need for disaster prone countries to have in place a disaster preparedness plan which includes a policy on the role of international NGOs offering assistance in times of disaster, in order to avoid confusion, duplication and waste of effort which would reduce the effectiveness of assistance to disaster victims,

Taking note of the growing number of NGOs involved in disaster relief and the variety of skills they bring to the disaster area, which can be of importance in increasing the benefits accruing to disaster victims, if well coordinated with national relief efforts,

Recognising the well founded and increasing demands of donor governments and other donor institutions for improved effectiveness in disaster relief through better coordination, and the need to present a coherent picture of international humanitarian action to world public opinion,

Being aware that an increasing number of governments in disaster prone countries have fully recognised the need for improved coordination by appointing special authorities or national voluntary agencies to coordinate relief efforts,

Urges all Governments of disaster prone countries to take steps, as a disaster preparedness measure, to ensure the establishment of National Disaster Relief Committees to provide overall coordination in times of disaster,

1. *Urges* that National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies should be represented upon such committees along with other relevant national NGOs,
2. *Recommends* that National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, in cooperation with the League and abiding by the Principles and Rules for Disaster Relief, take steps to facilitate the coordination of NGO efforts in disaster relief or to assist other appropriate national NGOs in so doing,
3. *Urges* the League to take steps to assist National Societies in fulfilling this role. These should include, inter alia,

Pre disaster preparedness assistance to National Societies to aid them in preparing for a possible coordination role,

Assistance to National Societies in times of disaster to carry out timely needs assessments and formulate effective relief action plans,

The provision of specifically allocated and suitably equipped international personnel, in times of disaster, to assist National Societies in the critical work of gathering, analysing and sharing information, pertinent to the disaster, within the responding NGO community, with a view of providing a common basis of understanding from which cooperation and coordination can grow,

Assistance to National Societies, in times of disaster, to develop the potential to act as a facilitator between the NGO community and the host government, if so requested.

30 September, 1991

ANNEX II

Disaster Response Strategy; From Preparedness Through Relief To Rehabilitation.

Our target is vulnerable people and our aim is to prevent suffering as well as react to it.

Today, disaster preparedness takes two basic forms. First, the traditional approach of strengthening our ability to respond when disaster strikes. Thus the training of staff and volunteers and the stockpiling of supplies becomes important. Secondly, a new approach is starting to be taken where disaster preparedness is seen as part of the normal development activities of Society branches. Here, preparedness is about identifying who is likely to be affected by disaster and why they will be affected. Actions are then taken to reduce this vulnerability.

When disaster strikes, National Society and League assistance to the disaster victims attempts to achieve two complementary aims. First, it must provide for the immediate basic needs of the affected population. Thus the adequacy of shelter, water, sanitation, food, medical services and protection from harassment must be addressed speedily and with due regard to the Fundamental Principles. Secondly, right from the beginning of our disaster interventions, we must be looking to the victims' future. Wherever possible, our interventions must be designed to reduce future vulnerability to disaster, rather than simply to return people to their previous state. This requires that National Societies and the League strive to understand the underlying causes of vulnerability and to carry out their disaster relief and rehabilitation interventions in a spirit of partnership with the affected community.

Within the League, we presently 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. These are the people we aim to assist in our disaster preparedness and response activities. 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.

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.

Recommendation to the General Assembly.

The Disaster Relief Commission calls upon the General Assembly to :-

Reaffirm that the purpose of the League's work in disaster prevention, relief and rehabilitation is to provide immediate relief and create sustainable improvements in the well-being of the most vulnerable members of society.

Urge all National Societies to direct their disaster assistance to the most vulnerable.

Affirm a National Society's right of access to disaster victims in its own country.

Support the Secretary General in taking the necessary steps to improve the timeliness and appropriateness of the disaster assistance it renders to the National Societies.

ANNEX III

DISASTER RELIEF EMERGENCY FUND

The present rules for the Fund, adopted in decision 21 of the League General Assembly in October 1985 are attached. Whilst these provide for use of the Fund after a disaster, they make no provision for withdrawal from the fund to enable survey and preparedness for potential "predictable" disasters such as refugees, displaced persons or drought.

It is therefore proposed that the rules be modified as follows:

Article (1) delete "for immediate disaster relief assistance" and add in its place "for preparation and implementation of disaster relief assistance".

Article (4) Add a new subparagraph (c) as follows:

- (c) An amount not exceeding CHF 500,000 per annum for measures (including survey, training and pre-purchase of supplies) to increase preparedness for situations where circumstances (climatic, social, economic or political) indicate the potentiality of disaster.

Article (5) Add a new sentence after the present one. "Similarly where a withdrawal has been made from the fund under Rule 4 (c) for the pre-purchase of supplies for a potential disaster, the Fund shall be reimbursed for the same amount as soon as possible if an appeal is made."

The proposed amended text, including these alterations, is also attached.

Original Text

Disaster Relief Emergency Fund

The General Assembly adopted the following revised rules:

- 1) The purpose of the Fund is to provide the Secretary General with financial resources which he can use, subject to the rules, for immediate disaster relief assistance.
- 2) The Fund has been created by merging the previous DREF with the Special Restricted Reserve by decision of the League's General Assembly.
- 3) The balance in the Fund shall not be less than Swiss Francs 1,000,000 at any time.
- 4) Subject to Rule 3, the Secretary General shall be authorised to withdraw from the Fund:
 - a) an amount not exceeding Swiss Francs 500,000 for any relief operation for which an appeal is launched by the League,
 - b) an amount of up to Swiss Francs 300,000 per annum for disasters for which no appeal is launched.

- 5) Withdrawals from the Fund under Rule 4 a) shall be reimbursed as soon as possible from the proceeds of the appeal.
- 6) Monies in the Fund not required for immediate use shall be invested in accordance with the League's investment policies.
- 7) The Fund shall be credited annually with interest at an average rate for short-term Swiss Franc investments made by the League. The Fund may also receive contributions from National Societies or other sources.
- 8) The Fund shall be included in the League's Annual Financial Statement as a fund administered by the League, and shall be subject to audit by League's auditors.

Proposed revised text

(changed text is underlined).

Rules for the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund

The General Assembly adopts the following revised rules for the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund:

- 1) The purpose of the Fund is to provide the Secretary General with financial resources which he can use, subject to the rules, for preparation and implementation of disaster relief assistance.
- 2) The Fund has been created by merging the previous Disaster Relief Emergency Fund with the Special Restricted Reserve by decision of the League's General Assembly.
- 3) The balance in the Fund shall not be less than Swiss Francs 1,000,000 at any time.
- 4) Subject to Rule 3, the Secretary General shall be authorised to withdraw from the Fund:
 - a) an amount not exceeding Swiss Francs 500,000 for any relief operation for which an appeal is launched by the League,
 - b) an amount of up to Swiss Francs 300,000 per annum for disasters for which no appeal is launched.
 - c) an amount not exceeding Swiss Francs 500,000 per annum for measures (including survey, training and pre-purchase of supplies) to increase the League's preparedness for situations where circumstances (climate, social, economic or political) indicate the potentiality of disaster.
- 5) Withdrawals from the Fund under Rule 4 a) shall be reimbursed as soon as possible from the proceeds of the appeal. Similarly where withdrawal has been made from the Fund under Rule 4 (c) the Fund shall be reimbursed for the same amount as soon as possible if an appeal is made.
- 6) Monies in the Fund not required for immediate use shall be invested in accordance with the League's investment policies.
- 7) The Fund shall be credited annually with interest at an average rate for short-term Swiss Franc investments made by the League. The Fund may also receive contributions from National Societies or other sources.
- 8) The Fund shall be included in the League's Annual Financial Statement as a fund administered by the League, and shall be subject to audit by League's auditors.

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