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Programme donors
On June 10-14, the Turkish Red Crescent Society hosted the National Red Crescent and Red Cross Societies of 49 of the member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) in Istanbul for a consultative forum on the humanitarian values that should guide the International Committee of the Islamic Crescent (ICIC), an organ of the OIC whose constitutive agreement recently went into force.

The forum addressed a number of issues, but devoted one morning to discussing IDRL in the context of the OIC and how best to disseminate the new Guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance (IDRL Guidelines).

The participants affirmed that IDRL should be made a central concern for the ICIC and its parent body. It was also noted that the Arab League had recently been discussing the Guidelines in light of its own 1987 agreement on cooperation in disaster relief and that this could be an additional fruitful means to increase cooperation with governments.

Participants also emphasized that National Societies and the Federation (both from its Geneva headquarters and its regional “Zone” offices) must be active in disseminating and promoting the Guidelines if they are to have a real impact. In doing so, they cautioned that care should be taken to ensure complementarity with existing mechanisms of coordination within the Movement. To ensure effective advocacy, they called for on-going field research in order to gather best practices in this field.

Among other points, the consultative group’s final “Istanbul Declaration” called on all states to implement the IDRL Guidelines and to ensure the free circulation of humanitarian personnel and assistance in disaster settings. The text of the Declaration will be presented to a meeting of OIC foreign ministers to take place in Kampala, Uganda later this month.

The consultative meeting coincided with the celebration of the 140th anniversary of the founding of the Turkish Red Crescent Society, whose founding in 1868 made it one of the first National Societies to be formed at the birth of the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement.
The Philippines updates its rules for the acceptance of international assistance

As Typhoon Fengshen recently demonstrated, the Philippines remains prone to major disasters. For this reason, the Government has been updating its procedures for facilitating international assistance.

As expressed by the Philippines Secretary of Health, Francisco Duque, “donation acceptance and distribution are plagued by unnecessary delays that, more often than not, render the donated items outmoded for addressing the emergency and disaster needs. Such delays are mostly brought about by the fact that concerned [Department of Health] offices have no set procedures and protocols for handling and administering donations…”

In response, the Department of Health recently adopted an Administrative Order containing guidelines on accepting and processing both foreign and local donations received by the Philippines government during emergencies and disaster situations.

The guidelines establish a process whereby the Department of Health issues a list of items required and then grants a “Deed of Acceptance” for specific offers of cash or in-kind goods, to facilitate their speedy clearance and entry into the country. In acute emergency situations, the guidelines also allow for a fast-track process whereby the Deed of Acceptance may be waived, provided that goods conform with the UN list of emergency relief items. The guidelines also require donations, in particular medicines, to meet a number of other quality standards and include procedures for packaging, labelling and expiry date checks.

“Donation acceptance and distribution are plagued by unnecessary delays . . . brought about by the fact that concerned offices have no set procedures and protocols.”

Francisco Duque, Philippines Secretary of Health

Additionally, the Philippines Government has updated its memorandum of understanding (MOU) between relevant government departments on the facilitation of international relief teams and accompanying equipment.

In this MOU, the various departments are tasked with different aspects of facilitation and regulation of assistance ranging from expedited entry for international teams and the issue of identification cards, to the prompt issue of clearance for the entry and exit of aircraft and vessels, goods and equipment. It also enables the granting of special permits for foreign medical personnel and the facilitation of transport for international assistance in and out of affected areas.
Setting strategies in Senegal and Côte d’Ivoire

In separate briefing sessions held in Dakar on June 16 and Abidjan on June 18, the IDRL programme shared ideas with senior staff of the National Red Cross Societies of Senegal (SRCS) and Côte d’Ivoire (CIRCS) on means to achieve implementation of the IDRL Guidelines in their countries.

“Senegal has not had any recent disasters requiring international assistance,” noted Senegal Red Cross Society Secretary-General Adama Kamara, “But it is our responsibility to prepare in case we do.”

He affirmed that the SRCS would soon make preliminary contacts about the IDRL Guidelines with the Ministries of Health and Foreign Affairs and indicated that an upcoming seminar on disaster contingency plans would be an additional opportunity to raise the issue.

In Abidjan, CIRCS National Coordinator of Community Health Nioulé Leonard noted that his society worked closely with civil protection authorities and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including during the consultation process for developing the Guidelines.

He pointed out that the CIRCS was currently participating in a working group with the civil protection authorities to examine national disaster preparation and response policies, and the CIRCS would raise implementation of the IDRL Guidelines to its attention.

CIRCS National Coordinator for Principles and Values Diabi Boubacar underlined that success with the Guidelines would require active promotion and dissemination by both the Federation and the National Society to ensure that they enter the national dialogue.
Red Cross/Red Crescent cooperation with ASEAN in Cylone Nargis operation endorsed

On May 29th, the Federation organized a special meeting in Kuala Lumpur of National Societies from Southeast Asia to discuss measures to scale up relief efforts to communities affected by Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar. IDRL Asia Pacific Coordinator Victoria Bannon was asked to present to the group about the ASEAN Agreement for Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER), which has been ratified by Myanmar and several other ASEAN governments, as well as various other tools developed by the ASEAN Committee for Disaster Management to encourage greater cooperation for regional disaster response.

The group noted the many similarities between AADMER and the IDRL Guidelines on issues such as offers/requests for assistance, visas for relief personnel, customs and duty exemptions for relief goods and equipment, coordination with international relief providers and minimum standards of quality and accountability. It was pointed out (as reported in the March 2008 edition of the IDRL E-newsletter), that ASEAN has used the IDRL Guidelines in developing standard operating procedures for applying the AADMER. As ASEAN increases its role in assisting the Myanmar authorities to welcome greater international assistance, these provisions could provide a solid basis for facilitating its entry.

Participants at the meeting saluted the good cooperation that has grown up over the last few years between ASEAN and the Federation, in particular on the issue of IDRL. It was determined to strengthen this relationship in the context of the Nargis operation, and to actively participate in the advisory task force ASEAN has established with regard to its activities in Myanmar.

On June 9th, the Myanmar Red Cross joined the UN and other members in participating in a joint assessment team organized by ASEAN to determine the humanitarian needs in the Ayeyawaddy (Irrawaddy) Delta.

Special Thanks

The IDRL Programme would like to thank the Turkish Red Crescent Society for its generous hospitality at the recent OIC consultative forum in Istanbul, and to the Senegal and Cote d’Ivoire Red Cross Societies for inviting to provide briefings.

It would also like to extend its appreciation to the staff of the Federation’s West and Eastern Africa Zone offices for their assistance and support of its participation in their June planning meetings.

The Programme is grateful to Karina Lehman for representing it at the recent session of the International Diploma for Humanitarian Assistance in New York.

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