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APEC to promote legal preparedness under new strategy for disaster risk reduction and response

On November 22nd-23rd, the 16th Economic Leaders meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in Peru capped several months of consultations on the most pressing economic and social issues in the region. Among these, natural disasters were identified as a critical threat to human security and development to member economies.

In their “Lima Declaration”, APEC heads of state recognized that “greater coordination is needed as the number of disaster management arrangements and players in the region continues to grow.” They therefore endorsed a new Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Preparedness and Response, developed this summer by APEC’s Task Force on Emergency Preparedness.

Among the potential initiatives included in the new APEC Strategy is a plan to cooperate with the IFRC and other partners to assist member economies to examine their level of legal preparedness for regional and international disaster assistance. This will include workshops and seminars to provide member economies with information about the IDRL Guidelines and other international norms as well as pilot projects at the country level to assist member economies to analyse their current state of legal preparedness for disaster cooperation.

The Economic Leaders Meeting also welcomed several other initiatives on disaster cooperation. These include a new set of “APEC Principles on Disaster Response and Cooperation” proposed by China, a “Stock-take on Disaster Management Capacity Building Needs,” and a joint Australia-Indonesia plan to develop a “Disaster Reduction Facility” in Jakarta to encourage risk reduction measures in the region.

The latter Facility, planned to be operational as of April 2009, will seek to increase the coherence of disaster cooperation in Asia Pacific, including through “advocacy for more comprehensive uptake by countries in the region of the IFRC Guidelines on disaster relief and recovery.”
For three days in December, governments from the Asia Pacific region gathered in Kuala Lumpur to discuss progress towards the objectives of the Hyogo Framework for Action on Disaster Risk Reduction.

The overarching theme of the conference was ‘Multi-stakeholder Partnership for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Asia and Pacific Region’, with a focus on public-private partnerships and community-based disaster risk reduction activities. Participation by over 30 representatives from National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the IFRC, led by Australian Red Cross Chairman and Federation Governing Board Member Mr. Greg Vickery, ensured a strong Red Cross Red Crescent presence.

The need to develop and strengthen legal frameworks for disaster risk reduction was a cross-cutting theme throughout the conference, highlighted in Mr. Vickery’s official statement to the conference and also in a presentation during the Federation’s side-event from the IDRL Asia Pacific Unit on legal preparedness for risk reduction and international cooperation.

On the last day, the conference adopted a final Declaration which not only acknowledged the important contribution of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies to disaster risk reduction but also made several references to the development of legal and policy frameworks and emphasised the need for “strengthening legal preparedness for international disaster cooperation, in particular through the promotion and use of relevant guidelines.”

National Societies from East Asia to seek greater engagement with their governments on IDRL

Leaders of the five National Red Cross Societies of East Asia met in Macau in December for their annual Leadership Meeting to discuss progress on a number of key issues, including follow up on IDRL.

National Societies reflected on their auxiliary role to national authorities, observing that while most were officially recognised in national disaster management legislation, there was still room for further clarification about specific roles and mandates, which could be facilitated through discussions with governments on IDRL.

However, they also noted that governments in the region were often reluctant to consider international assistance. They requested the IFRC to support them in their dialogues with their authorities, including by organizing a regional meeting of governments and National Societies to discuss the key issues.
A strong commitment to IDRL advocacy on the African continent has emerged from the 7th Pan-African Conference of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which convened in Johannesburg on October 19-23.

The Conference brought together the leaders of 53 African National Societies to discuss humanitarian priorities on the continent and to set out a plan of action for the next four years. In the realm of disaster preparedness, the discussions addressed measures to build communities’ risk reduction capacities as well as ways to strengthen partnerships between National Societies and their governments. On this point, there was an expression of the need for active engagement with governments on IDRL, so that laws can be enacted to allow the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement as a whole to deliver its most efficient relief efforts in disasters.

A special working group was dedicated to the issue of IDRL on October 22. Fernanda Teixera, Secretary-General of the Mozambique Red Cross, and Boubacar Diabi, Principles and Values Coordinator of the Cote d’Ivoire Red Cross, presented papers on how IDRL was being taken up by their National Societies. Commission participants noted that “many governments still have major gaps in their laws on disaster management, and in particular on international relief. National Societies, through their good relations with governments, have sometimes been able to obtain necessary legal facilities but there is a need for this to be made systematic. Good law can institutionalize this goodwill to make it more effective.”

The outcome of the Conference was a resolution adopting the Johannesburg Commitment. In the field of legal preparedness for disasters, National Societies committed themselves, to “advocate that governments use the guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster assistance to strengthen Africa’s laws on international disaster assistance, making appropriate use of our roles as auxiliaries to the public authorities in this regard.”
IDRL Workshops in Asia and Western Africa

"That’s a big binder!" Eyebrows high in disbelief, participants were presented with substantial packets of international legal instruments at two recent IDRL training and consultation workshops. By the end of a series of interactive sessions, however, they had not only mastered many of the documents, they had also made an important start in setting out a Red Cross/ Red Crescent strategy for legislative advocacy in disaster management.

On November 13-14, representatives from 12 Asian National Societies, 3 participating National Societies, IFRC, ICRC, OCHA and the UNLJC gathered in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia for the first-ever regional training session on IDRL and consultation on legislative advocacy. Two weeks later, on November 25-27, representatives of 13 West African National Societies, IFRC, ICRC, ECOWAS and UNJLC convened for a similar workshop in Abuja, Nigeria.

The theme of both workshops was “putting legal preparedness into practice.” Participants were confronted with a number of scenarios from recent disaster operations presenting thorny legal and policy issues. For many of these, existing international instruments provide substantial guidance, though not always all the answers.

Participants were also consulted about the development of a new manual for National Societies in legislative advocacy in the area of disaster management. In this context, they were able to share their own experiences and strategies, including those learned from promoting IHL.
Selected IDRL speeches around the world

Inter-Parliamentary Union
October 13, Geneva

On the invitation of the IPU’s Secretary-General, IFRC Deputy-Secretary-General Ibrahim Osman addressed the IPU’s Governing Council about the IDRL Guidelines. Following their adoption at the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent last November, Osman noted that “the next step is in the hands of lawmakers, like yourselves, who must take up the question of whether and how these Guidelines can be useful in your national contexts.”

ASEAN Roundtable on Nargis
November 26, Yangon

Dr. Amnat Barlee of the Thai Red Cross delivered a statement on behalf of the Movement at this high-level roundtable on the Cyclone Nargis operations. He called on “all those involved in the ongoing response to Nargis – the Government of Myanmar and humanitarian actors – to make use of the IDRL Guidelines in finding ways to resolve some of the challenges.”

BSEC Lessons Learned Workshop
December 3, Yerevan

Susana Harutyunyan, head of the IFRC’s delegation in Armenia, was invited to speak about IDRL and Red Cross issues to this Black Sea Economic Cooperation workshop on lessons learned from the Spitak Earthquake. BSEC officials indicated their strong interest in the IDRL Guidelines and in strengthening the cooperation with the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.
Special thanks

The IDRL Programme is very pleased to express its thanks for the second time this year to the

Norwegian Red Cross

for providing support for the position of the new Africa IDRL delegate.

We would also like to thank

Finnish Red Cross

&

DFID

for their new pledges of support for the IDRL programme in 2009.

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We benefitted from a great deal of help in the organization of our recent IDRL training and consultation workshops. We are particularly grateful to Ausaid and DFID for their financial support for the Kuala Lumpur and Abuja workshops, respectively.

We would also like to thank the UN Joint Logistics Centre and OCHA for lending us excellent facilitators as well as the staff at the IFRC’s Asia-Pacific Zone Office in Kuala Lumpur, West and Central Africa Zone Office in Dakar, West Coast Regional Delegation in Lagos, and Legal Department in Geneva for their hard work in helping us to put these successful events together.

New faces of IDRL

Aishah Amin joined our Asia Pacific ID RL Unit in Kuala Lumpur in August as an ID RL Officer. She comes with several years of experience in relief and communications with Mercy Malaysia, and conference organizing and reporting work with the UN and Malaysian government.

Eilif Torma began as the ID RL delegate for Africa in November, based in Nairobi. Eilif gained extensive legal and business experience in Norway before he began his humanitarian career with the IFRC and the Norwegian Red Cross, with postings in Kosovo, Macedonia, Croatia, Lebanon, Uganda and Nairobi.

Helga-Bára Bragadóttir will start her new position as ID RL delegate for the Pacific in January, based in Suva. With academic training in anthropology and conflict resolution, Helga-Bára has served as a governance specialist for UNDP in Angola and Fiji and has been a volunteer at the Icelandic and British Red Cross Societies.
About the Federation’s IDRL Programme

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies’ IDRL Programme seeks to reduce human vulnerability by promoting legal preparedness for disasters through advocacy, technical assistance, training and research. For more information, please see our website at [www.ifrc.org/idrl](http://www.ifrc.org/idrl).

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