

International disaster response laws, rules and principles (IDRL)

Laws in disaster – preparing for international disaster response

Good disaster preparedness is not just about ensuring that effective local and national response systems are in place. It should also take into account the possibility that external assistance may be required when a disaster exceeds national capacities.

Too often, urgently needed international disaster response is delayed, or even prevented, by national legal and regulatory systems which are ill-equipped to deal with the needs of international relief providers. Similarly, international assistance should be conducted in a responsible and coordinated manner to minimize its impact on local resources and ensure good quality and accountability standards by both relief providers and donors.

Fortunately, many of these issues can be identified and addressed before disaster strikes. This can be achieved by anticipating the likely needs of a country in disaster and identifying the potential legal and administrative challenges for the entry and coordination of international assistance. This enables appropriate steps to be taken by governments and relief providers to prevent unnecessary obstacles in the way of provision of fast and effective assistance to people affected by disaster.

What are the challenges in disaster operations?

There are a number of areas which frequently pose challenges in situations requiring international disaster response. These challenges apply differently to governments, NGOs and international organizations.

Personnel

- Delayed or refused entry permission/visas for foreign relief workers
- Legal difficulties hiring local staff and volunteers
- Lack of legal protection, privileges and immunities for relief workers
- Lack of recognition of professional qualifications of relief workers

Legal status of foreign organizations

- Lengthy procedures for gaining legal status to operate in a foreign country
- Difficulties transferring/exchanging money and opening bank accounts
- Vulnerability to false legal claims, arrest, detention and seizure of property
- Restrictions in carrying out mandate

Goods and equipment

- Delays on the import, export and transit of relief goods, medicines and equipment
- Imposition of taxes, fees and tolls on relief activities
- Restricted use of communications equipment
- Difficulties with use of vehicles, aircraft and shipping

Coordination, quality and accountability

- Inadequate information-sharing about the disaster and the humanitarian needs
- Sending unnecessary or inappropriate relief items and assistance
- Undervaluing local knowledge and response capacities
- Use of untrained or unqualified personnel
- Lack of adherence to quality/accountability standards

For more information about IDRL Fact sheet, please visit our web site:
www.ifrc.org/what/disasters/idrl/