Disaster Law in Asia Pacific

Asia Pacific is the world’s most disaster prone region. In the past 45 years, 88% of all people affected by natural disasters have lived in Asia Pacific. These disasters have resulted in an economic loss of over US$1.15 trillion.

Every year, 26.4 million people globally are displaced by natural disasters. Women, boys and girls are 14 times more likely to die during a disaster than men. 70% of countries in the Asia Pacific remain legally underprepared to manage a large scale disaster.

What are the benefits of a good Disaster Law?

- Increased safety and reduced vulnerability of people and infrastructure
- States are empowered to lead and coordinate disaster response operations in their country, including international assistance, and facilitate efficient and effective response to people affected by disasters
- Creates a legal enabling environment for strong disaster risk management, with clear roles and responsibilities assigned across agencies from national to local level
- All resources sent to a disaster affected country are requested and appropriate
- Gender perspectives are integrated in all disaster-related policies and practices, and women’s leadership at all levels of society is promoted, ensuring a more inclusive and holistic disaster risk management approach
- Adequate funding, accountability and engagement mechanisms for disaster risk reduction decision-making are ensured
- Ensure engagement of communities, civil society, the private sector and scientific institutions in disaster risk management decision making and activities

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Saving lives, changing minds.
The Disaster Law Programme is created by a resolution of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Council of Delegates.

The 28th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent calls on the IFRC and National Societies to lead efforts to identify legal gap areas and make recommendations to address them.

The 30th International Conference adopts the ‘Guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster’ (IDRL Guidelines) through Resolution 4.

The 31st International Conference adopts Resolution 7, reiterating the urgency to bring laws in line with IDRL Guidelines and requests states to review their national legislation in terms of disaster risk reduction and regulatory barriers to shelter after natural disasters.

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) sign the Agreement on Rapid Response on Natural Disasters.


Extra support in times of disaster:
The Disaster Law Programme can provide additional support in-country during times of disaster through emergency deployments to provide legal and policy advice to in international disaster response. Such support was provided in Typhoon Haiyan (Philippines), Tropical Cyclone Pam (Vanuatu), the Nepal earthquake and the Myanmar floods.

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Without an adequate legal framework to facilitate international assistance, challenges can arise that negatively impact the disaster response:

Vietnam and Bangladesh: Both Vietnam and Bangladesh have made a legislative ‘paradigm shift’ from a response driven model to a greater focus on DRR. This shift has had a startling impact in both countries and dramatically reduced mortalities from disasters.

Indonesia: The experience from the 2004 earthquake and tsunami triggered radical changes in Indonesia’s legal and institutional framework for disaster response. The Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) has been instrumental in this process and worked closely with its government to improve preparedness for international assistance as well as DRR in its law. As a result, Indonesia is now considered a global leader on disaster risk management.

New Zealand: Strict quarantine rules hindered the entrance of some urban search and rescue dogs following the 2011 earthquake.

Samos: Unsolicited goods sent during the 2009 tsunami are still being disposed of at cost to the Government.

Vanuatu: Demonstrated the necessity to clearly request international assistance based on national needs.

Philippines: The Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010 recognizes that vulnerable and marginalized groups face higher exposure to disaster risk and poverty. The Act ensures that women, social welfare representatives, as well as Philippine Red Cross have a seat at the table and can take an active part in the decision-making in national and local councils.

Cook Islands: With technical input from Cook Islands Red Cross, their government adopted standing operating procedures and a model emergency decree drawing on the IDRL Guidelines in 2014. This experience will soon be replicated in Tonga who are embarking on a similar process.

Learning from experience: the Red Cross Red Crescent supporting governments on disaster law.
How the IFRC supports development of disaster law:

Resources and Tools

- The IDRL Guidelines
- Model Act on IDRL & Model Emergency Decree
- Effective law and regulation for disaster risk reduction
- The Checklist on Law and Disaster Risk Reduction
- The Handbook on Law and Disaster Risk Reduction

Further Resources

- Rapid tenure assessment
- Minimum elements for community-based land mapping
- Gender-sensitive approaches for Disaster Management
- Minimum standard commitment to gender and diversity in emergency programming

For more information, please contact:

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