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COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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Australian Government
AusAID

Humanitarian Action Policy

JANUARY 2005

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ABOVE: *Effects of Cyclone Ami, Vunimolo, Fiji.* PHOTO: Andrew McCallister, NZ Red Cross.

1 Introduction

THE HUMANITARIAN ACTION POLICY DEFINES THE GOALS OF AUSTRALIAN HUMANITARIAN ACTION AND OUTLINES THE ACTION REQUIRED TO ACHIEVE A COHERENT AND STRATEGIC RESPONSE TO EMERGING HUMANITARIAN PRIORITIES.

The policy is predominantly concerned with the core element of humanitarian action: the protection of life, health, subsistence and physical security. It recognises the functional links between humanitarian activities and broader aid policies and programs. It highlights the need for development programs to take into account the risks posed by disasters and conflict to the achievement of poverty reduction, sustainable development and security.

Because humanitarian action frequently occurs within a broader context of security and development assistance, the Humanitarian Action Policy needs to be read in conjunction with Australia's Poverty Reduction Strategy and its Peace, Conflict and Development Policy.

AusAID is increasingly integrating its humanitarian action and development activities to ensure Australian responses are coordinated. The links between development and humanitarian action are clear. The long-term effects of disasters and crises undermine growth prospects and hard-won development gains. Where capacity to deliver services is low or insecurity prevails, vulnerability to hazards and conflict increases and poverty is exacerbated.

Humanitarian action in itself cannot reduce poverty, nor can it prevent or reduce conflict. The Humanitarian Action Policy deals with the symptoms of conflict and complements the Peace, Conflict and Development Policy that specifically addresses conflict prevention, conflict management and reduction, peace-building and post-conflict recovery. Through such measures outlined in this policy, humanitarian action can help counteract social instability, reduce vulnerabilities and strengthen local capacities.

In the context of this policy, humanitarian action includes not only protection and material assistance but also capacity building, vulnerability reduction, the promotion of disaster and emergency prevention and preparedness measures. The policy has a particular focus on increased participation by beneficiary governments and communities in all levels of activities.

The Humanitarian Action Policy must also be able to address those events that may become humanitarian issues. The principles set out in this policy will apply to unpredictable or sporadic events such as epidemics, terrorist attacks and situations of chronic food insecurity. It also addresses the compounded, interrelated effects of HIV/AIDS and humanitarian crises.

DIFFERENTIAL IMPACTS OF CRISES



ABOVE: *Flooding in Bangladesh; Natural disasters can destroy years of development.*

PHOTO: © GMB Akash/Panos Pictures

Poverty and poor governance lie at the root of vulnerability to emergencies and disasters. Countries with low development indices and a high economic dependency on primary production have historically suffered disproportionately from the impact of disasters. In 2003, natural disasters resulted in 75,000 deaths across the globe. Economic losses amounted to more than AU\$86 billion. Most of the fatalities were in countries of low or medium development.

The most vulnerable people are at greater risk because as individuals, families and communities they lack resources and government support to reduce risks and to cope with effects of disasters before, during and after impact. Economic and social impacts can be severe. Disasters adversely affect economies and livelihoods by damaging productivity and means of earning (loss of infrastructure, arable land, tools and draught animals, loss of infrastructure, destruction of factories and small business enterprises). Families who lose their means of livelihood during a disaster find it difficult to recover from the adverse effects.

Political, economic and social stresses, which lead to violent conflict, are also more likely to occur in countries with a poor record of accountability and democratic participation. During the 1990s, over one-

third of the world's countries were directly affected by warfare at some time. Most were fought within States rather than between States. Many represent 'windows' on societies under stress from the impact of globalisation on traditional systems, burgeoning populations, economic inequities and divisive policies.

The human toll of these conflicts is exacting. Nations with low human development indices accounted for 76 per cent of conflict-related deaths. The 23 million internally displaced people in the world and 90 per cent of the 13 million refugees are all located in countries with low or medium development indices. The burden of refugees on host communities places additional demands on already scarce resources.

Over 90% of casualties are civilian. Paramilitary groups and war lords forcefully conscript many combatants with scant regard for the provisions of international humanitarian law. UNICEF reports suggest that over 300,000 child soldiers, some as young as eight, are exploited in armed conflicts in over 30 countries. Many more children are subject to sexual violence, forced marriages, slavery and deprivation by armed groups.

2 Definition

The Principles and Practice of Good Humanitarian Donorship and associated Implementation Plan endorsed by major donors, including Australia, at a June 2003 meeting in Stockholm state:

“THE OBJECTIVES OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION ARE TO SAVE LIVES, ALLEVIATE SUFFERING AND MAINTAIN HUMAN DIGNITY DURING AND IN THE AFTERMATH OF MAN-MADE CRISES AND NATURAL DISASTERS, AS WELL AS TO PREVENT AND STRENGTHEN PREPAREDNESS FOR THE OCCURRENCE OF SUCH SITUATIONS.”

The delivery of humanitarian assistance to all populations in need must be neutral, impartial and independent, i.e. there must be no political, economic or military conditions and humanitarian workers must not take sides in conflict. The Stockholm principles and guidelines reflect the donor consensus on what constitutes good donor practice in the humanitarian field. They provide the general benchmark against which Australia will improve the coherence, impact and accountability of its humanitarian actions (see appendix 1).



ABOVE: Food aid can be an important component in helping people resettle following conflict.

PHOTO: AusAID

3 Policy goals

TO PROTECT LIVES, ALLEVIATE SUFFERING, MAINTAIN HUMAN DIGNITY AND ASSIST RECOVERY FROM CONFLICT, NATURAL AND OTHER DISASTERS, THROUGH EFFECTIVE RESPONSE, PREVENTION, PREPAREDNESS AND RISK REDUCTION.

In accordance with the international goals and principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship, Australia's Humanitarian Action Policy goals will be informed by the principles of burden sharing, independence, neutrality and impartiality. The overarching goal of the policy is:

To protect lives, alleviate suffering, maintain human dignity and assist recovery from conflict, natural and other disasters, through effective response, prevention, preparedness and risk reduction.

In line with the geographic focus of the broader development cooperation program, Australia's humanitarian action will remain primarily focussed on the Asia-Pacific region. However, recognising our international partnerships and responsibilities, Australia will continue to respond to emergencies in other parts of the world. In doing so our response will be guided by the scale of the disaster or crisis, our ongoing responsibilities in the Asia-Pacific region, the response by other donors and our capacity to assist and make an effective contribution.

The need to work together on issues that cross traditional sectors and boundaries will require the active participation of a range of Australian departments and agencies. This whole of government approach will necessitate different departments leading on those aspects in which they are best informed and for which they have the authority, e.g. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on diplomatic negotiations and advocacy or Attorney General's Department on international humanitarian law. This integrated approach means not just a well-

coordinated approach but also a collective effort leading to the most effective response to the challenges faced by the development cooperation program in delivering humanitarian action.

To achieve a coherent and strategic response to humanitarian priorities, Australia will:

Meet the protection needs of vulnerable people by alleviating the effects of abuse and restoring dignified conditions of life to people affected by disasters and complex emergencies.

We will do this:

- > through the provision of material assistance to sustain life and health and to prevent and relieve suffering
- > through engagement with relevant United Nations agencies, international organisations, NGOs and community organisations
- > by advocating access to displaced populations for humanitarian agencies
- > by support for an increased number of protection officers in the field
- > by support for the development of more effective protection mechanisms and suitable training initiatives.



ABOVE: Assisting people trace family members, relatives and friends is a vital activity in post-conflict situations.

PHOTO: AusAID



ABOVE: It is important to continue immunisation programs for children throughout humanitarian crises.

PHOTO: AusAID

Foster respect for international humanitarian law, refugee and human rights law.

We will do this (in concert with partner departments) by:

- > advancing the understanding and application of international humanitarian law and practice in humanitarian training
- > actively participating in international forums
- > funding international humanitarian law programs and training
- > promoting international humanitarian law, refugee and human rights law in whole of government policy settings.

Meet the safety requirements of humanitarian workers.

We will do this by:

- > encouraging appropriate security and evacuation plans to be put in place
- > supporting security and logistic coordination mechanisms in complex emergencies
- > appropriate training programs for humanitarian field workers
- > advocacy for the independence of humanitarian action in integrated missions.

Create closer links between development and humanitarian programs to address root causes of insecurity and vulnerability and improve transition planning.

We will do this by:

- > further integration of AusAID's humanitarian programs into country and regional program areas
- > strengthening planning for humanitarian action in AusAID country program strategies
- > maintaining a core area in AusAID, specialising in humanitarian action, to provide policy and operational advice on current best practices
- > developing guidelines on humanitarian assessment in development cooperation programs, e.g. by more thoroughly analysing the particular needs of vulnerable groups
- > developing strategies aimed at reducing vulnerability of HIV/AIDS-affected areas to humanitarian crises.
- > entering into longer term funding arrangements with humanitarian agencies to permit greater flexibility and responsiveness of action and to promote better planning.

Assist governments and communities in the region to develop their own capacity to reduce the impact of disasters and to prevent disasters from undermining development objectives.

We will do this by:

- > respecting the central role that local communities and all levels of government have in managing risks from disasters
- > helping to strengthen the organisational capacity of national disaster management offices
- > strengthening the capacity of local communities to plan for and mitigate the effects of disasters
- > mainstreaming gender principles into disaster management programs
- > mainstreaming HIV/AIDS strategies into disaster management programs
- > analysing the developmental and humanitarian benefits of investment in disaster mitigation, risk reduction and preparedness activities and promoting the findings within the region to increase the priority accorded to prevention and mitigation measures
- > applying community-based disaster management practices.

Strengthen international, regional, and local partnerships to obtain rapid mobilisation of resources and to provide an effective channel to extend the reach and impact of Australian humanitarian assistance beyond our region.

We will do this by:

- > encouraging and funding selected Australian NGOs to expand their analytical, planning and response capacities, in particular in the Asia-Pacific region
- > supporting the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement
- > supporting United Nations coordination and rapid response mechanisms
- > strengthening the level of engagement with multilateral partners
- > building and maintaining links with other donors and other Australian government agencies.

Incorporate gender considerations in planning, design, response, monitoring and evaluation to reduce the differential impact of crises on women and men and to ensure the skills and capacities of both are fully utilised at all stages and levels of activities.

We will do this by:

- > developing guidelines and examples of best practice to ensure women's as well as men's full participation in response, recovery, rehabilitation and all peace processes and that the needs of women and girls are fully addressed in crises
- > encouraging the implementation of the United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee Six Point Plan on prevention of sexual exploitation in humanitarian crises.

Reduce the vulnerability to and consequences of HIV/AIDS on those affected by humanitarian crises and reduce the impact of crises on people living with HIV/AIDS.

We will do this by:

- > incorporating HIV/AIDS analysis in developing and implementing humanitarian actions
- > developing strategies to link HIV/AIDS prevention activities to relief programs.

Improve the effectiveness, efficiency and combined efforts of military and humanitarian actors.

We will do this by:

- > improving coordination through consultation, information sharing and, where appropriate, careful division of tasks and collaborative planning.
- > playing an active role in developing training for peacekeepers, civilian police and humanitarian workers involved in complex emergencies
- > working to ensure that the use of military capacity and assets conform to international humanitarian law and principles and that all military activity in support of humanitarian operations is accountable to civilian authorities.

4 The policy in action

Humanitarian action is being applied in an increasingly difficult environment: the lack of recognition and respect for core humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence of humanitarian action; increasing threats to humanitarian workers; targeting of civilians and other non-combatants; and the predominance of internal conflicts involving not regular, disciplined armies but war lords, conflict entrepreneurs, para-military forces and criminals.

These features of contemporary conflicts have led to increased numbers of displaced people, limited access for humanitarian workers and constriction of humanitarian space. Such environments have resulted in a closer relationship between military peacekeepers, civilian police and humanitarian workers. This means that a fully consultative process is needed in planning peacekeeping missions to ensure humanitarian actors are able to maintain independence. In addition, humanitarian action must deal with an ever increasing number of people being adversely affected by natural hazards and with the effects of the phenomenon of post-colonial weakly performing or 'failed' states.

In the past, humanitarian action was largely reactive. There was less focus on understanding and addressing the complex needs and resources, i.e. the overall protection of vulnerable groups of people, and more on the simple provision of material assistance. There is growing recognition that the humanitarian imperative has a place in development, particularly in building national and community capacities to manage the risks of conflict and disaster, and that greater attention is needed to the links between relief, rehabilitation and development.

However, humanitarian action differs from development programs. It is not necessarily aimed at the poorest sections of society but those in the most vulnerable situations. In many cases these do coincide, particularly in the capacities of communities to cope with the effects of natural disasters. But because humanitarian need is usually greatest where the security situation is worst, it also includes people who are suddenly made vulnerable by violent conflict, who find themselves homeless and without the necessary resources for daily existence.

In such situations, humanitarian action must bridge the tension between political or military objectives. It must comply with international humanitarian, human rights and refugee law, advocate peaceful solutions to crises and do no harm by prolonging or aggravating conflicts or by discouraging self-reliance. To be effective, humanitarian actors must be provided with timely and unconditional access to those in need and a safe and secure space in which to work.

Humanitarian action must take into account not only the material needs of vulnerable people but also their legal, economic and social needs. The Humanitarian Action Policy provides a more analytical and pro-active approach to the integration of development and humanitarian issues including through broad protection in complex emergencies (beyond that articulated in the Refugee Convention) and disaster risk management which emphasises multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral and community participation.



ABOVE: Damaged buildings and landscape shortly after Cyclone Heta swept through Niue.
PHOTO: Stephen Close/AusAID

NATURAL DISASTERS - SAMOA AND NIUE

When Cyclone Heta struck Samoa and Niue in January 2004 and Cyclone Ivy hit Vanuatu in February 2004, Australia's emergency response arrangements ensured rapid and coordinated responses. NGOs and AusAID offices in Apia and Wellington provided reports on damage and community needs. These offices offered financial assistance to the affected countries for immediate emergency response needs, such as medical supplies and aerial reconnaissance. AusAID and Emergency Management Australia (EMA) personnel were deployed to work with national authorities.

Australia responded to national government requests for emergency supplies by flying in tarpaulins, water containers and purification tablets through the joint efforts of AusAID, EMA and Department of Defence.

Australia worked with France and New Zealand (under the FRANZ Agreement) and United Nations representatives and shared information in Canberra and Wellington to coordinate an effective response. The Australian media and public were kept informed of developments by regular website updates and media releases.

In the aftermath, Australia replenished disaster stores and conducted a review of arrangements with AusAID staff, Defence, EMA and FRANZ partners. Lessons were identified which have been incorporated into improving our arrangements for future disasters, particularly on the critical issues of coordination between agencies and communications between AusAID's Canberra and overseas offices.



ABOVE: Women's Development project for displaced Tamil women from NE Province, Sri Lanka.
PHOTO: AusAID

COMPLEX EMERGENCIES - SRI LANKA

For more than 20 years, civil war ravaged Sri Lanka, claiming over 64,000 lives and leaving up to one million people displaced. The signing of an indefinite cease-fire agreement between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam on 22 February 2002, has given hope for a permanent cessation of hostilities and induced more than 200,000 people to return home.

Australia is contributing to peace-building and post-conflict rehabilitation efforts by providing substantial support to help refugees and those displaced by the conflict. Assistance is being provided through international organisations such as the International Organisation for Migration to help with the return and resettlement of Sri Lankan refugees from India; and through the International Committee of the Red Cross to protect civilians from violations of international humanitarian law and to trace persons missing as a result of the conflict.

Contributions have been made to the World Food Programme to assist over 100,000 people displaced by the conflict with relief food assistance. Funds are being provided to the UNDP Mine Action Programme to assist with rapid response mine action assessment and explosive ordnance detonation; and

to the UNDP to help fund activities aimed at economic recovery under its Transitional Program for Conflict Affected Areas.

We are working with UNICEF to assist with the rehabilitation of schools and improve children's access to education in the conflict-affected areas of the north and north-east; to assist the Government and local authorities to protect and promote the rights of women and children affected by war; to improve protection for displaced children and to provide education about the dangers of landmines and unexploded ordnance.

Support is also being provided through Australian and local NGOs: for disaster preparedness, mitigation and response training; creation of a framework for the resolution of land disputes between Muslims and Tamils; to improve the position of women by increasing their access to and control of income; contributing to the reduction in violence against women; improving accessibility to good primary health care and promoting the engagement of women in peace-building processes; and to meet the housing, water and income generation needs of Tamil returnees and female-headed households.

5 Accountability, efficiency and effectiveness

The size and type of our assistance will be proportional to the magnitude, severity, nature and location of any disaster. Within this framework, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness will be the prime considerations in determining the mode of response. For instance, in the Pacific the full range of response mechanisms, including Australian Government air transport of emergency supplies will

be considered. Further afield, other modes of assistance, usually through multilateral or non-government organisations, will be the norm. When considering other delivery channels, we will look for those organisations that can rapidly deliver services effectively on the ground and have a proven record of performance, accountability and efficiency.



ABOVE: Distribution of Australian funded seeds, tools and rice in Timor-Leste.
PHOTO: AusAID

6 Monitoring and evaluation

Humanitarian action is usually carried out in insecure, unstable or physically difficult environments. The ability to effectively monitor and evaluate humanitarian action depends on many factors. Some of these factors, such as access to affected areas, availability of objective information and the rightful imperatives of delivering assistance as soon as possible, are often beyond donor control.

Within these limits, AusAID will expand its monitoring and evaluation framework to specifically address contributions made and activities undertaken for humanitarian purposes. This framework will be designed to provide for three requirements:

- > to identify impact and achievements;
- > to allow for continuous improvement of AusAID humanitarian efforts through the learning and future application of contextual (well-grounded) lessons; and
- > to ensure an acceptable level of accountability and cost-effectiveness is maintained, even in difficult circumstances.

To this end, AusAID will:

- > develop a specific monitoring and evaluation framework covering all forms of preventive and responsive humanitarian action which incorporates methods, appropriate indicators and information gathering systems that assess both adherence to, and the outcomes of, this policy

- > design and implement this monitoring and evaluation framework while also recognising and respecting humanitarian imperatives
- > in line with the lessons derived from this monitoring and evaluation framework, revise approaches and response capacity to future complex emergencies and natural disasters
- > actively support the development of international standards through research into the accountability aspects of specific humanitarian issues and applying them to Australian procedures and systems
- > invite peer critique and review.

Such a framework will include a balance of quantitative and qualitative information to help identify not simply *what* happened but *why* it happened. It will be designed to measure the political and social impacts as well as the administrative performance and quantitative results of humanitarian action.

Appendix 1

PRINCIPLES AND GOOD PRACTICE OF HUMANITARIAN DONORSHIP

Endorsed in Stockholm, 17 June 2003

OBJECTIVES AND DEFINITION OF HUMANITARIAN ACTION

1. The objectives of humanitarian action are to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity during and in the aftermath of man-made crises and natural disasters, as well as to prevent and strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations.
2. Humanitarian action should be guided by the humanitarian principles of *humanity*, meaning the centrality of saving human lives and alleviating suffering wherever it is found; *impartiality*, meaning the implementation of actions solely on the basis of need, without discrimination between or within affected populations; *neutrality*, meaning that humanitarian action must not favour any side in an armed conflict or other dispute where such action is carried out; and *independence*, meaning the autonomy of humanitarian objectives from the political, economic, military or other objectives that any actor may hold with regard to areas where humanitarian action is being implemented.
3. Humanitarian action includes the protection of civilians and those no longer taking part in hostilities, and the provision of food, water and sanitation, shelter, health services and other items of assistance, undertaken for the benefit of affected people and to facilitate the return to normal lives and livelihoods.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

4. Respect and promote the implementation of international humanitarian law, refugee law and human rights.
5. While reaffirming the primary responsibility of States for the victims of humanitarian emergencies within their own borders, strive to ensure flexible and timely funding, on the basis of the collective obligation of striving to meet humanitarian needs.
6. Allocate humanitarian funding in proportion to needs and on the basis of needs assessments.
7. Request implementing humanitarian organisations to ensure, to the greatest possible extent, adequate involvement of beneficiaries in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian response.
8. Strengthen the capacity of affected countries and local communities to prevent, prepare for, mitigate and respond to humanitarian crises, with the goal of ensuring that governments and local communities are better able to meet their responsibilities and coordinate effectively with humanitarian partners.
9. Provide humanitarian assistance in ways that are supportive of recovery and long-term development, striving to ensure support, where appropriate, to the maintenance and return of sustainable livelihoods and transitions from humanitarian relief to recovery and development activities.
10. Support and promote the central and unique role of the United Nations in providing leadership and coordination of international humanitarian action, the special role of the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the vital role of the United Nations, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and non-governmental organisations in implementing humanitarian action.

GOOD PRACTICES IN DONOR FINANCING, MANAGEMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

(a) Funding

11. Strive to ensure that funding of humanitarian action in new crises does not adversely affect the meeting of needs in ongoing crises.
12. Recognising the necessity of dynamic and flexible response to changing needs in humanitarian crises, strive to ensure predictability and flexibility in funding to United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and to other key humanitarian organisations.
13. While stressing the importance of transparent and strategic priority-setting and financial planning by implementing organisations, explore the possibility of reducing, or enhancing the flexibility of, earmarking, and of introducing longer-term funding arrangements.
14. Contribute responsibly, and on the basis of burden-sharing, to United Nations Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeals and to International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement appeals, and actively support the formulation of Common Humanitarian Action Plans (CHAP) as the primary instrument for strategic planning, prioritisation and coordination in complex emergencies.

(b) Promoting standards and enhancing implementation

15. Request that implementing humanitarian organisations fully adhere to good practice and are committed to promoting accountability, efficiency and effectiveness in implementing humanitarian action.
16. Promote the use of Inter-Agency Standing Committee guidelines and principles on humanitarian activities, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the 1994 Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief.

17. Maintain readiness to offer support for the implementation of humanitarian action, including the facilitation of safe humanitarian access.
18. Support mechanisms for contingency planning by humanitarian organisations, including, as appropriate, allocation of funding, to strengthen capacities for response.
19. Affirm the primary position of civilian organisations in implementing humanitarian action, particularly in areas affected by armed conflict. In situations where military capacity and assets are used to support the implementation of humanitarian action, ensure that such use is in conformity with international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles, and recognises the leading role of humanitarian organisations.
20. Support the implementation of the 1994 Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief and the 2003 Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets to Support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies.

(c) Learning and accountability

21. Support learning and accountability initiatives for the effective and efficient implementation of humanitarian action.
22. Encourage regular evaluations of international responses to humanitarian crises, including assessments of donor performance.
23. Ensure a high degree of accuracy, timeliness, and transparency in donor reporting on official humanitarian assistance spending, and encourage the development of standardised formats for such reporting.

