



Alex Wintley/IFRC

# Strengthening **disaster laws**

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Saving lives, changing minds.

 International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

## Why disaster laws?



Over the last ten years, natural disasters have affected more than 2.3 billion people – the equivalent of one-third of the earth’s population – and they have wrought over US\$910 billion in damages. They are now indisputably among the largest threats to human security and development worldwide.

Due largely to the effects of climate change, the number and destructiveness of disasters are on the rise. These disasters are not impartial in the way they spread their impact. The largest human price is consistently borne by the poor and the vulnerable, both in wealthy and developing countries.

Experience has shown that effective domestic laws can be indispensable tools for reducing vulnerability to disasters and ensuring an effective response. Weak laws, on the other hand, can hinder progress in making populations safer and stall their recovery.

For the last ten years, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and its member National Societies have been engaged in research and consultations around gaps and best practice in legislation for disasters. This brochure presents three key areas of concern.



## Legislation for disaster risk reduction at the community level

“Laws are not just good for creating committees, they can and should also help communities to help themselves”

**Bekele Geleta,  
Secretary-General,  
IFRC**



### Why worry about risk reduction at the community level?

It is at the community level that disasters are most keenly felt and, frequently, it is also where risk reduction steps can make the biggest difference. However, recent studies show that global progress in disaster risk reduction has been weakest at this critical level.

### What can legislation accomplish?

Effective legislation can :

- promote the involvement of communities and civil society in disaster risk reduction activities and planning
- guarantee adequate funding for risk reduction at the community level
- mandate education about disaster risk
- set realistic and enforceable standards for land management and construction at the community level
- ensure community-level risk mapping

### How can I make a difference?

Encourage your government to evaluate its disaster laws to make sure they are empowering communities and leading to real reduction of risks at the local level.

## Regulatory barriers to emergency and transitional shelter

### Why focus on shelter?

In the immediate aftermath of major disasters, huge numbers of persons can be displaced at once. For these survivors, secure shelter is critical to their health, security and livelihoods.

### Why worry about regulatory barriers?

Increasingly, regulatory problems have been identified as among the largest barriers encountered by shelter professionals seeking to help displaced people meet this human need.

### What are the most common regulatory barriers?

- Gaps in documented evidence of ownership rights
- Unfair treatment as between documented owners and others needing shelter (e.g. renters and squatters)
- Unfair treatment as between women and men
- Lack of effective procedures for temporarily requisitioning land

### How can I make a difference?

Encourage your government to prepare its procedures in advance of a disaster to ensure speedy and fair shelter assistance.



“Help should have no bounds, no legal barriers”

**Gov. Corazon Alma de Leon, Board Member, Philippines Red Cross**

## Legal preparedness for international disaster response

“The IDRL Guidelines have helped us to see the gaps that need to be addressed in our law”

**Carlos Iván Márquez,**  
Director, Directorate of  
Risk Management,  
Colombia



### Why focus on international disaster response?

Recent events, like the 2010 earthquake in Haiti and the 2011 triple disaster in Japan, show that any country may someday need international help, and that help may mean the difference between life and death, misery and dignity for affected communities.

### Why worry about legal preparedness?

Managing the growing numbers and variety of international responders is an increasing challenge for affected states. Unnecessary bottlenecks, delays and expenses, as well as poor oversight and quality in relief are common problems in international operations.

### What progress has already been made?

In 2007, the State Parties to the Geneva Conventions adopted the “Guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international relief and early recovery assistance” (IDRL Guidelines). Since then, several dozen states have adopted or have begun to develop new legislation or regulations drawing on the Guidelines.

### How can I make a difference?

Encourage your government to use the IDRL Guidelines to assess their legal preparedness for international disaster assistance.



## Disaster laws and the IFRC

In 2001, the IFRC launched its **International Disaster Response Laws, Rules and Principles (IDRL) Programme** with the goal of reducing human vulnerability by promoting legal preparedness for disasters.

Since then, the IFRC and National Societies have worked with partners in the United Nations, regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, academic experts and others to research regulatory frameworks for disaster management, provide support to interested governments, provide training on legal issues, and disseminate information about this frequently neglected area of the law.

### On our website:

- Interactive on-line training on IDRL
- Database of international and national legal instruments on disaster management
- Model Act on the Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance
- IDRL news and videos
- Case studies from around the world
- Find us in 5 languages at [www.ifrc.org/idrl](http://www.ifrc.org/idrl).



**For more information on how you can support the IFRC in building a safer world please contact**

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