



Briefing note: Single Window International Facilitation Team (SWIFT)

Critical legal facilities should be provided as a package to trusted international relief providers¹ in the emergency and initial recovery periods, including the reduction of legal and administrative barriers to the entry of eligible (qualified) humanitarian actors, importation, transit and the re-exportation of special equipment such as telecommunication resources, vehicles, medications and food. Provisions should also be made to carry out customs controls and clearance outside the normal business hours of government offices. For this purpose, recent disaster operations have established a Single Window International Facilitation Team “SWIFT” which has proved extremely effective. The SWIFT is comprised of representatives from governmental institutions responsible for the management of international disaster assistance and deployed at the country entry points to facilitate the registration and entry of international humanitarian assistance.

1. What is the SWIFT?

A SWIFT is a specialized unit within the Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) that is established for the purpose of consolidating and expediting the legal requirements concerning the entry of incoming international personnel, goods, equipment and transport, as well as to support the management of international disaster assistance; additionally, it applies a control mechanism through the selection of international actors entitled to support the response operations based on established quality criteria.

2. Who comprises the SWIFT?

This SWIFT shall form part of the Emergency Coordination Centre, and it should be comprised of representatives from relevant ministries and agencies that play a role in international disaster response. Upon the declaration of state of emergency, these representatives shall be deployed to primary points of entry for international disaster assistance, including, relevant airports, seaports and land border crossing points as circumstances dictate.

The SWIFT representatives should include:

- a. The Civil Protection Department (DPC)
- b. Relevant ministries, governmental agencies or departments that play a role in disaster response such as: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health, Customs, Migration, Finance, Civil Defence, Armed Forces, Public Security, Authority of Ports and Airports and any other institutions deemed necessary by the country's governmental structure.
- c. Haiti Red Cross Society
- d. Local government authorities, United Nations (UN) Agencies, regional organizations, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Red Cross and Red Crescent (RC/RC) Movement Components (IFRC, International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], other RC/RC National Societies).

3. Purpose of the SWIFT

The SWIFT is responsible for:

- a. The management of the international humanitarian assistance process through a Civil Protection Department coordinator, who works jointly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- b. Provide advice and support to the Emergency Coordination Centre in order to facilitate the entry of international assistance.
- c. Apply the provision set out in the Emergency Decree, applicable legislation and ad hoc procedures established for the emergency.
- d. Coordinate with the SWIFT representatives that are sent to the entry points, assuring the application of special procedures convened for the international response operation.

¹ Legal Information Sheet for disaster response– Haiti, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 04 October 2016.



4. Activation of the SWIFT:

- a. The SWIFT should be activated as a result of a State of Emergency Declaration to operate within the international relief period and the initial recovery period.
- b. During the international relief period, SWIFT representatives shall be deployed at the main entry points, guaranteeing permanent coordination with their counterparts stationed at the Emergency Coordination Centre.

5. SWIFT in practice:

The model of the SWIFT has proven significantly useful to the effective management of large influxes of international humanitarian assistance. For example, in December 2013 and January 2014, the government of Philippines established a “one stop shop” (equivalent to the SWIFT) situated at the international airports, which brought several government agencies together in one location to expedite customs clearances for humanitarian shipments in response to Typhoon Haiyan.

Recently, as response to the 2016 earthquake in Ecuador, the national government established the “International Humanitarian Assistance Group” (equivalent to the SWIFT) as an advisory body to the Emergency Coordination Centre. This group was in charge of formulating ad hoc procedures to facilitate the entrance of humanitarian aid at the entry points.

The idea of a multi-stakeholder taskforce was first conceived by the Centre for Disaster Prevention in Central America (CEPREDENAC) as a solution drawn from the lessons learned of Hurricane Mitch in 1998. To date, each of the 6 Central American countries has a Centre for the Coordination of International Humanitarian Assistance; these centres are in charge of advising the Emergency Coordination Centre on the management of international assistance after a disaster strike, the direct provision of legal facilities to qualified international actors at the country’s points of entry and the coordination of international support.

The IDRL Guidelines: In 2007, the government of Haiti joined the other parties to the Geneva Conventions by adopting the “**Guidelines for the domestic facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief and initial recovery assistance**”² (also known as the “IDRL Guidelines”) at the 30th International Conference of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. These Guidelines are drawn from existing international laws and best practices, and they are designed to help governments solve the most common legal issues faced during international operations. The Guidelines may be helpful to Haitian authorities when developing new emergency decrees, procedures and regulations to facilitate and oversee the influx of international disaster assistance, especially since governments reiterated the “urgency” to strengthen legal frameworks for the management of international disaster assistance in 2015.

The IDRL Model Act: In 2011, the “Model Act for the Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance”³ was developed to assist states in the strengthening of their legal preparedness for international disaster cooperation; the IDRL Model Act built upon and intended as a supplement to the IDRL Guidelines, and its Article 14 recommends the creation of a “Single Window International Facilitation Team” (SWIFT).

² The Guidelines are available at <http://www.ifrc.org/idrl>.

³ Art. 14 of the Model Act on IDRL is available at: <http://www.ifrc.org/docs/IDRL/MODEL%20ACT%20ENGLISH.pdf>