International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

# Background information sheet

## Normative Standards on Risk Reduction

Laws and standards cannot prevent natural hazards such as windstorms, droughts, earthquakes and tsunamis. However, they can assist in managing vulnerability to these hazards. They can also substantially reduce the risk of man-made disasters such as industrial or transport accidents. Vulnerability to any of these sorts of disasters is intimately tied to more general issues such as poverty, discrimination, environmental protection and the overall development process.

### Standards at the international level

Disaster risk reduction has been coming to the fore of international discussion in recent years. In resolution 42/169 of 1987, the United Nations General Assembly designated the 1990s the



A Nigerien girl receives a mosquito net from the International Federation.
*Photo: Alain Daudrumez/International Federation*

"International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction" in order to encourage more international cooperation in this area. More recently, in January 2005, a United Nations conference adopted the non-binding but politically authoritative Hyogo Framework for Action,[1] which sets out five priority areas for international cooperation in the area of risk reduction for the next decade.[2] The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (www.unisdr.org), a division of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, is the focal mechanism organizing follow-up to the adoption of the Hyogo Framework.

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[1] All documents named here can be found in the IDRL Database at http://www.ifrc.org/idrl.
[2] The five priority areas are :

1.   Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation.
2.   Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning.
3.   Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels.
4.   Reduce the underlying risk factors.
5.   Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.

The Hyogo Framework built upon the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action, agreed in 2004.

In addition, there have been a number of regional and bilateral agreements over the years for mutual assistance in risk reduction efforts, particularly with regard to the sharing of technical expertise (for example, the Protocol between the Kingdom of Spain and the Portuguese Republic on Technical Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in the Field of Civil Defense of 1992 and the Agreement between the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) and the World Meteorological Organization of 1987).

Moreover, many treaties require states to take measures to prevent environmental and industrial disasters both within and outside their own borders (for example, the International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Cooperation of 1990 and the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal of 1989). Some treaties also require members to warn each other of hazards developing within their borders that might represent a threat to other states (for example, the revised International Health Regulations of 2005, the Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident of 1986, and the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response of 2005). Some environmental agreements address human activities that increase the potential for natural hazards to develop. Examples include the United Nations Convention on Climate Change of 1992 and its Kyoto Protocol of 1997 and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification of 1994 (UNCCD).

Of particular interest to the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement are those international agreements setting out a substantial role for local communities and volunteers in reducing their own risks and vulnerabilities. This is emphasized in the Hyogo Framework and UNCCD, but also appears in other instruments, such as the Arhaus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters of 1998.

**At the national level**

At the national level, laws and regulations in many different areas may be relevant to reducing disaster risk, including urban planning rules, building codes, shoreline and waterway management law, industrial regulation, transport rules and environmental policy. While all states have legislation in most of these areas, these laws do not always highlight disaster reduction issues. As noted above, laws to address poverty, discrimination and agricultural management should be seen as components of an overall programme to reduce vulnerability to hazards.

A number of governments have included mechanisms to foster risk reduction strategies and activity in an overall disaster response policy and legislation. This is the case, for example, in Nicaragua with its Law Number 337 Establishing the National System for Prevention, Mitigation and Response to Disasters and its implementing regulations.

**For more information**

See the IDRL web site and online legal database at [www.ifrc.org/idrl](www.ifrc.org/idrl) or contact us at:

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