

IDRL Emergency Fact Sheet

The Bahamas

October 29, 2025

This International Disaster Response Law (IDRL) Emergency Fact Sheet is intended to provide key information to international humanitarian actors, including the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement operations and network, relating to the regulatory and policy environment applying to the entry of incoming disaster relief.

This document provides an IDRL Snapshot of The Bahamas, followed by information on the current / recent disaster context as well as more detailed information on key issues related to international disaster assistance.

Visit the IFRC Disaster Law website: <https://disasterlaw.ifrc.org/> to know more about our work on IDRL.

Disclaimer:

- *This update was produced on October 29, 2025, and does not take into account changes in circumstances beyond that date.*
 - *Where documents were not available online, information was taken from secondary sources.*
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IDRL Snapshot for The Bahamas

	Issue	Status	Comment
1.	Legal framework for IDRL	✓	Yes. The Disaster Risk Management Act, 2022, along with supporting plans and protocols: ○ National Disaster Emergency Plan ○ Family Islands Disaster Emergency Plan ○ National Disaster Coordination Protocols ○ National Humanitarian Assistance Standards
2.	Focal point for coordination	✓	The DRM Authority is the liaison between Government and international actors.

3.	Roles and responsibilities of key actors relating to international disaster assistance outlined	✓	Roles and responsibilities are outlined in the DRM Act as well as the plans, protocols and standards listed above.
4.	Process for requesting, welcoming, terminating assistance	✓	See. s. 66-70 of the DRM Act.
5.	Legal facilities for international actors	✓	The Prime Minister has the power to grant certain facilities. However, this is still discretionary. See s. 72 of the DRM Act.
6.	Quality standards for international actors	✓	All actors providing humanitarian assistance are required to abide by the National Humanitarian Assistance Standards.
7.	Eligibility requirements for international actors to receive legal facilities	✗	
8.	Specialised unit for expediting assistance	✗	
9.	Provisions for transparency, safeguards and accountability mechanisms	✓	The National Humanitarian Assistance standards make some provision for applying principles of 'do no harm', feedback and complaints mechanisms, and monitoring and evaluation
10.	Procedures for the sending, transit, and re-exportation (unused goods, equipment) of international disaster assistance	✗	

Current / Recent Disaster Impacts

- (October 2025) Hurricane Melissa:** Category 5 Hurricane that first made landfall in Jamaica on October 28, 2025, with maximum sustained winds of 175 mph. Expected to weaken by the time it makes landfall in The Bahamas but will still be at hurricane strength when it moves across southeast Bahamas. Islands in the central and southeast Bahamas are expected to begin experiencing tropical storm to hurricane conditions beginning Tuesday, (October 28, 2025) and Wednesday (October 29, 2025) based on current track. A Hurricane Warning went into effect for the Central and Southeast Bahamas including Exuma and its Cays, Ragged Island, Rum Cay, Long Island, San Salvador, Cat Island, Acklins, Crooked Island, Long Cay, Mayaguana and Inagua.
- (2019) Hurricane Dorian:** Category 5 Hurricane impacted The Bahamas in September 2019. It was considered the strongest hurricane on record in the Atlantic basin, causing catastrophic devastation to the islands of Abaco and Grand Bahama, pounding the islands for 48 hours. There were 74 deaths, with 281 persons not accounted for, and damage amounting to USD \$3.4 billion.

Preparedness Actions

- **Hurricane Melissa:**
 - **Declaration of disaster alert:** The Prime Minister declared a disaster alert on October 27, 2025 for the following areas:
 - Acklins
 - Cat Island
 - Crooked Island and Long Cay
 - Exuma
 - Inagua
 - Long Island
 - Mayaguana
 - Ragged Island Chain
 - Rum Cay
 - San Salvador
 - See **THE DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT (DECLARATION OF DISASTER ALERT) (CENTRAL AND SOUTHSEAST BAHAMAS) ORDER, 2025:** <https://getready.gov.bs/event-dashboard/>
 - **Mandatory Evacuations:** Mandatory in effect for the following areas:
 - Acklins
 - Crooked Island and Long Cay
 - Inagua
 - Mayaguana
 - Ragged Island Chain
 - See **THE DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT (EVACUATION) (SOUTHEAST BAHAMAS) ORDER, 2025:** <https://getready.gov.bs/event-dashboard/>
 - **Inter-Ministerial Committee for Disaster Risk Management** was convened for the first time, at the beginning of the Hurricane Season 2025, where key policies under the DRM Act were adopted. See article: <https://drm.gov.bs/features/1944/>

Legal and Institutional Framework

- Government authority for managing disasters in The Bahamas is the **Disaster Risk Management Authority (DRM Authority)**.

Relationship of legal instruments



- The legislation governing disaster risk management, and which established DRM Authority is the **Disaster Risk Management Act, 2022**:
<https://cdn.bahamas.gov.bs/tenant/tenantgotb/documents/All%20Documents/Exo9December2022-20240118135013.pdf>
- The DRM Act provides for (among other things):
 - S. 5(1) Development of a Disaster Risk Management Policy (in development)
 - **S. 8 Development of a National Disaster Risk Management Plan**
 - **S. 9 Development of a National Disaster Emergency Plan (see below)**
 - S. 10 Requires public bodies to develop a Public Body Disaster Risk Management Plan and a Public Body Disaster Emergency Plan.
 - S. 11 Requires Administrators to develop a Local Disaster Risk Management Plan and a Local Disaster Emergency Plan.
 - S. 13 Development of a Comprehensive Financial Strategy for DRM
 - S. 14 Establishes a National Disaster Emergency Operations Centre
 - **S. 15 Development of National Disaster Coordination Protocols (see below)**
 - S. 16 National Disaster Risk Information System
 - S. 19 Disaster Emergency Fund
 - **S. 21 Development of National Humanitarian Assistance Standards (see below)**
 - **S. 22 Establishes an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Disaster Risk Management**
 - **S. 34 Disaster Risk Management Consultative Committee**
 - **S. 35 Humanitarian Needs Assessment**
 - **S. 49 Declaration of disaster emergency**
 - **S. 54 Activation of disaster emergency measures**
 - **S. 55 Identification of a disaster zone**

- **S. 56 Evacuation orders**
- **S. 57 Coordinating entities** – refers to coordination in relation to the conduct of damage and loss assessments, rapid restoration of essential services, determine the scope and extent of recovery
- **S. 58 – Humanitarian assistance** – refers to the responsibility of the government to provide humanitarian assistance, based on needs assessment and in consideration of the needs of vulnerable persons on account of their age, disability, poverty, lack of resources, physical displacement or gender.
- S. 64 Establishment of a Non-Governmental Consultation Council.
- **S. 66 International Assistance** – refers to procedures for regulating the acceptance and termination of international assistance; privileges and immunities for persons providing international assistance; requirement to develop a needs list;
- **S. 68 – List of Needs** – DRM Authority mandated to prepare list of goods, services, equipment requested
- **S. 69 – Travel Clearance** – refers to clearances or exemptions required for field teams.
- **S. 70 – Authority to be liaison** – refers to the DRM Authority as the liaison between the international actor and the Government.
- **S. 72 – Declaration of relief by Prime Minister in a disaster** – refers to the power of the Prime Minister to make provisions for relief. This includes the granting of waivers and tax exemptions. Orders shall specify the kind of relief granted, persons to benefit, duration, amount and procedures to follow.

- **National Disaster Emergency Plan (2025)**

<https://drm.gov.bs/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/NDEP-Public-Summary-03092025-2.pdf>

The National Disaster Emergency Plan outlines the early warning systems and the conditions and arrangements for a Declaration of Disaster Alert Order; **outlines emergency response procedures, incident coordination measures** and conditions and arrangements surrounding the issue of a Declaration of Disaster Emergency Order; **outlines post-event emergency response measures; disaster and humanitarian needs assessments**, search and rescue and evacuation orders; transition from response to rehabilitation and recovery.

- **National Disaster Coordination Protocols (2025)**

<https://drm.gov.bs/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/National-Disaster-Coordination-Protocols-v01.pdf>

The National Disaster Coordination Protocols outline the roles and responsibilities of all the Emergency Support Functions and coordination procedures and standards.

- **National Humanitarian Assistance Standards (2025)**

https://drm.gov.bs/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/National-Humanitarian-Assistance-Bahamas_v07_Digital.pdf

The National Humanitarian Assistance Standards outlines standards for delivering humanitarian assistance by the Government to the Government or by humanitarian aid organizations. They are based in accordance with the Sphere Standards and focus on shelter, WASH, food security and nutrition, health and logistics.

- **Family Islands Disaster Emergency Plan (Draft) (2025)**

Structural Framework For Emergency Management – National Disaster Emergency Operations Centre (NDEOC)

Fig 2.4: NDEOC Framework

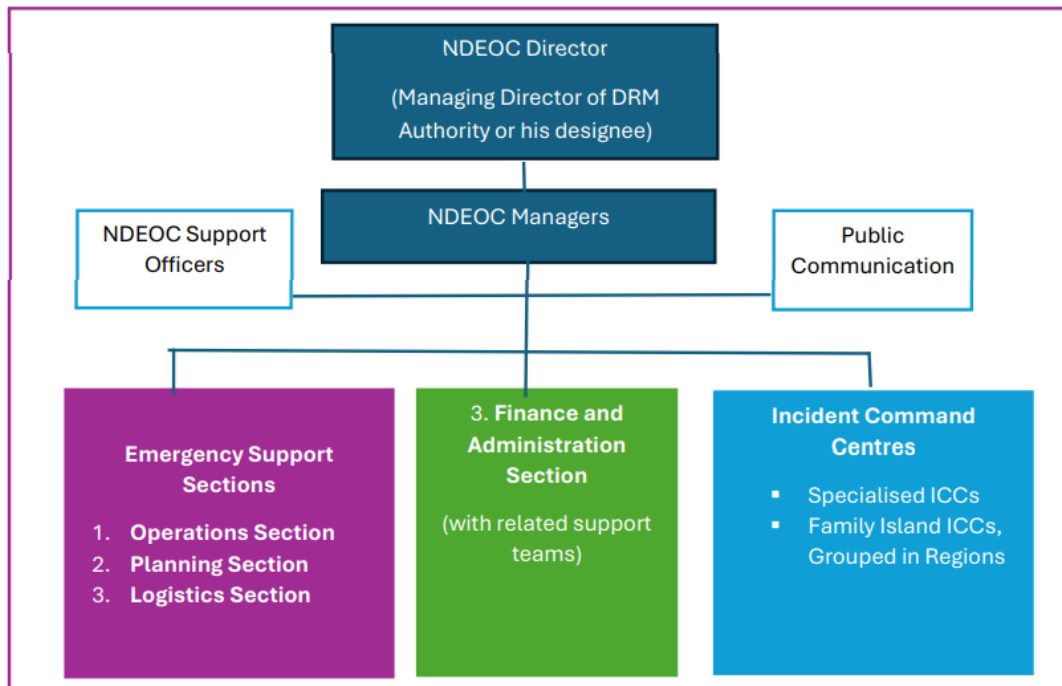


Fig 2.3A Key Roles and Responsibilities in The Bahamas' DRM Machinery

Entity/Position	Summarised Responsibilities	Reports To
1. The Prime Minister	Ultimate and final authority for all DRM policies and executive decisions.	People of The Bahamas.
2. Ministry with Responsibility for DRM	Ministerial guidance on all DRM issues and executive oversight of DRM Authority.	Cabinet/PM
3. The Inter-Ministerial DRM Committee	Cabinet sub-committee that is the policy-level focal point of inter-sectoral collaboration on DRM, ensuring that risk resilience and sustainability factors are integrated across government. Convenes as the NDEC during an emergency (see below).	Cabinet/PM Under the DRM Act, the IMDRMC reports to Parliament on the implementation of the National DRM Policy and the Comprehensive Financial Strategy for DRM.
4. The National Disaster Emergency Council	Takes the place of the IMDRMC during an emergency, thus ensuring high-level coordinated decision-making. Cabinet level inter-sectoral coordination and decision-making during emergency response, ensuring that there is adequate and appropriate	Cabinet/PM
5. The DRM Authority	support for national coordination processes across government. Leadership, implementation and coordination of all DRM activities and requirements set out in the DRM Act. Provides technical support to improve DRM at all levels and technical guidance to the PM and Cabinet on issues related to DRM, risk resilience and related aspects of sustainable development. Assumes command of the NDEOC and all coordination activities during an emergency response (unless delegated based on the level or nature of the response required), using a unified command approach.	 Ministry with Responsibility for DRM on policy level issues. Chairman of the Authority, in administrative oversight issues. During an emergency, the Managing Director of the Authority maintains a direct line of reporting to the PM and provides daily briefings to the National Disaster Emergency Council.
6. The National Disaster Emergency Operations Centre	Operational level mechanism for coordinated inter-sectoral emergency response action and related decision-making.	Director of the NDEOC (Managing Director of the DRM Authority), as well as to the NDEC through daily briefings.
7. FI Administrators	Leadership and coordination of local emergency activities within their capacity, with guidance, direction and support from the DRM Authority. Assumes incident command of local disaster events or incident scenes, under the guidance and direction of the DRM Authority.	For the purposes of disaster management, FI Administrators report to the DRM Authority. Implement responsibilities ascribed to Family Island Administrators/local government structures as set out in the DRM Act.

8. Emergency Support Function (ESF) Coordinators	Inter-agency coordination of key emergency functions.	For the purposes of disaster management, ESFs and their coordinators report to the DRM Authority.
9. Public Bodies	Leadership and implementation of institutional and sectoral emergency activities within their mandate area, with guidance, direction and support from the DRM Authority.	For the purposes of disaster management, heads of Public Bodies report to the DRM Authority. Implement responsibilities ascribed to public bodies, heads of agencies etc., as set out in the DRM Act.

Entry of Foreign Humanitarian Personnel

- **Hurricane Melissa:**
 - No special visas, or visa arrangements or announcements for disaster relief personnel.
- **Entry visas** are not required from most Commonwealth countries, USA. To see the full regime of visa requirements for entry into The Bahamas see the Immigration requirements: <https://www.immigration.gov.bs/entry-requirements/>
- **Work permits:** For periods between 1-90 days, a person could apply for a **short-term work permit. They are meant for emergencies and are a one-time application.** For periods over 90 days, a regular work permit must be applied for.
Short term work permit application: <https://www.immigration.gov.bs/residence/short-term-work-permit/>
Long term work permit application: <https://www.immigration.gov.bs/residence/annual-work-permit/>

Requirements for International Actors

- **Coordination of international actors**
 - There are no specific provisions for registration of international actors. However, the **DRM Act (s.70)** requires the DRM Authority to coordinate with international actors. This coordination will involve (**See p. 27 National Disaster Emergency Plan**):
 - Agreeing with international development, humanitarian and disaster risk management partners the sectoral or geographical scope of their assistance, thereby reducing the risk of overlapping or duplicated efforts.
 - Establishing clusters, where appropriate.
 - Creating linkages between international actors who are new to the country and those who have long-term partnerships with the GOBH.
 - Holding coordination meetings and sharing information among international actors.
- **Determining eligibility of international actors to qualify for legal facilities**
 - There are no specific criteria for determining eligibility.
- **National Humanitarian Assistance Standards**

- All actors are required to abide by the National Humanitarian Assistance Standards in relation to shelter, WASH, food security and nutrition, health, logistics.
- Principles of 'do no harm', feedback and complaints mechanisms, and monitoring and evaluation are included as core standards.

See: https://drm.gov.bs/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/National-Humanitarian-Assistance-Bahamas_v07_Digital.pdf

IFRC Legal Status

- IFRC has an active Legal Status Agreement in Bahamas (signed 2022) that provides IFRC with certain rights and privileges including:
 - Facilities: Apply the Resolution on 'Measures to Expedite International Relief' adopted by Resolution VI of the 23rd International Conference (1977).
 - Facilitate deployment of emergency logistics operating from The Bahamas for support in the Caribbean.
 - Freedom to hold, transfer funds, currency from one country to another and to convert currency into another.
 - Exempt from all direct taxes and customs duties.

NOTE: Although this agreement has been signed, it will only be operational once specific legislative amendments/orders on privileges and immunities have been enacted by Parliament. At the time of writing, these amendments had already been given its first and second reading in Parliament. It is expected to be assented to in the coming weeks.

RECOMMENDATION: Should the Hurricane Melissa response require international assistance, liaise with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, through the Bahamas Red Cross to get these legislative amendments expedited in Parliament to facilitate easy entry of goods and personnel.

Customs duties and tax waivers

- **Hurricane Melisa: Waiver of Duties, Taxes and Fees**
 - No specific waivers or exemptions of tax in relation to Hurricane Melissa have been published.
- **Bahamas Red Cross currently benefits from:**
 - **Exemptions under Tariff Act** as a charitable organisation, s. 5
https://laws.bahamas.gov.bs/cms/images/LEGISLATION/PRINCIPAL/2013/2013-0027/2013-0027_2.pdf
 - **VAT refunds** s. 58 of the VAT Act:
<https://inlandrevenue.finance.gov.bs/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/BVAT14Final.pdf>
 - **Exemptions from Real Property Tax**, as a charitable organisation, s. 42(j):
<https://inlandrevenue.finance.gov.bs/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/bha112689.pdf>

NOTE: Bahamas Red Cross, in parallel with IFRC, applied for privileges and immunities similar to those of IFRC. These also require legislative amendments and are in the process of being enacted by Parliament.

RECOMMENDATION: Should the Hurricane Melissa response require international assistance, the National Society should liaise with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to get these legislative amendments expedited in Parliament to facilitate easy entry of goods and personnel.

Entry of goods, relief

- **Hurricane Melissa:**
 - No specific expedited measures have been published yet.
- Procedures for **requesting and accepting international assistance** are outlined in the DRM Act, s. 66
- Prime Minister has the **power to make provisions for disaster relief** including the granting of waivers and tax exemptions. Orders shall specify the kind of relief granted, persons to benefit, duration, amount and procedures to follow. DRM Act, S. 72
- DRM Authority is the lead in relation to **ESF 7, Logistics, Relief Supplies, Resource Management** – See National Disaster Coordination Protocols p. 32

Other Legal Facilities

No clear provisions explicitly provided for:

- Expedited procedures for recognition of foreign professional qualifications.
- Freedom of movement for international actors to access a disaster-affected area during a disaster response.
- Safety and security of international actors.

Contact

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