

Humanitarian Aid Policy of Japan

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1. Introduction: Human Security and Humanitarian Assistance

Humanitarian assistance is generally defined as aid designed to save lives, alleviate suffering, and maintain and protect human dignity based on humanitarianism. Its ultimate goal is to protect the lives, dignity and safety of the most vulnerable – including refugees, internally-displaced persons (IDPs) and disaster victims – and support them so that they will be able to stand on their own feet again. The Government of Japan considers humanitarian assistance as not only an emergency response measure¹ but also to include rescue operations, recovery and reconstruction assistance as well as disaster risk reduction.

Humanitarian assistance is part of efforts to ensure human security. The concept of human security, which focuses on individuals, seeks to protect them from threats to their survival, livelihood and dignity, and help them fulfill their abundant potential. In other words, human security aims to support their self-reliance and create a sustainable society through protection and empowerment. As a nation that endorses human security as one of the pillars of its foreign policy, Japan will continue to extend humanitarian assistance in an appropriate and proactive manner while taking into account recent developments regarding humanitarian crises.

Japan's commitment to humanitarian assistance will remain unshaken by the unprecedented disaster of the Great East Japan Earthquake. Assistance extended to Japan in the aftermath of the disaster from numerous countries, including those from the developing world, reflects the recognition given to the country's achievements in international cooperation in a wide range of forms. Japan's revitalization and reconstruction would not be possible without cooperation with the international community. While mobilizing its resources for reconstruction, Japan will remain committed to addressing humanitarian crises, among other challenges facing the international community.

Steady and sustained implementation of humanitarian assistance requires that the public or the taxpayers fully understand the value and need for such aid. This would be achievable only when the Government of Japan makes its utmost efforts for effective and efficient delivery. With this in mind, the Government of Japan will make humanitarian assistance more transparent and thus hold itself fully accountable to the public by steadily monitoring work, evaluating its outcomes, and proactively making such outcomes and other relevant information available to the public.

2. Assessment of the Current Situation Surrounding Humanitarian Assistance

Recent years have seen the increasing diversification of humanitarian crises – critical situations that call for humanitarian assistance such as natural and man-made disasters,

¹ The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines humanitarian aid as “assistance designed to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of emergencies.”

especially internal conflicts, and changing circumstances surrounding such crises. Japan will fully consider these situations and international circumstances in delivering humanitarian assistance.

There are four important elements for Japan to take into account. The first element is that humanitarian crises are becoming prolonged and more complex. Humanitarian assistance has intrinsically referred to assistance in a temporary emergency due to a man-made or natural disaster. Recent years have witnessed situations often described as prolonged humanitarian crises extending over 10-20 years or forgotten crises in many parts of the world.² It is often the case that a number of factors are intricately involved, such as, an ethnic and/or political feud, a fight over natural resources, and a natural disaster, in addition to a temporary conflict.

The second element is that natural disasters are increasing in number and scale. It is generally believed that climate change plays a role in this. There is also concern that rapid urbanization in developing countries increases their vulnerability to natural disasters, which in turn causes more casualties and economic damage.³ The increasing number and magnitude of natural disasters may hamper socioeconomic development of developing countries, which in turn may bring about political instability.

The third element is that conflicts are increasingly diversified in terms of both form and the actors involved. Since the end of the Cold War, non-state actors as well as states have been involved in conflicts, and the line between combatants and noncombatants has become blurred. Consequently, there are an increasing number of cases where the basic principle of humanitarian law that in a conflict, unengaged civilians must not be attacked is not observed and humanitarian aid workers become the intended target of attack in an armed conflict. This constitutes one of the serious obstacles to humanitarian assistance.

The fourth element is that modalities of humanitarian assistance are becoming more diversified. As humanitarian crises are becoming more complicated, diversified, and prolonged, there are increasing opportunities for humanitarian assistance to be delivered in parallel with reconstruction assistance or UN peacekeeping operations. In fact, military forces increasingly provide indirect support for humanitarian assistance; there are even cases where military assets are directly put to use for such assistance. The question now is what role military forces should play in humanitarian assistance and what form civilian-military cooperation should take.

3. Respect for the Basic Principles of Humanitarian Assistance

The Government of Japan respects the basic principles of humanitarian assistance, which are humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

² According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of the end of 2009, some 5.5 million people had been living in exile for five years or more.

³ The 2009 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction issued by the United Nations Secretariat for International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) states that climate change plays a part in the increase of weather-related disasters. It also states that due to the urbanization process, greater volumes of rainwater are channeled into drains and rivers, instead of being absorbed into the ground.

The principle of humanity is to respect the life, dignity and safety of every individual. The principle of impartiality is to disallow discrimination of any form based on nationality, race, religion, social status or political belief; strive to save individuals according to the extent of their suffering; and give priority to those who are facing the most urgent difficulty. The principle of neutrality is to take no sides in a conflict: not to support any party to a political, racial, religious or ideological rivalry. The principle of independence is to maintain autonomy.

In delivering humanitarian assistance, the Government of Japan also complies with relevant international guidelines, including refugee-related treaties, the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship⁴ that define the basic policy for donor countries to respect, and the Oslo Guidelines, which set out basic principles on the use of foreign military and civil defense assets in disaster relief.⁵

4. Concrete Policy of Response

(1) Assistance to refugees and IDPs

As of 2009, there were more than 43 million refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) around the world, who had fled from such hazards as conflict, natural disaster and persecution. The Government of Japan believes that humanitarian assistance to refugees/IDPs is necessary in the context of ensuring human security, contributing to peace and stability in a wider region.

Specifically, through international organizations, the Government of Japan provides relief supplies such as shelter, food and water to refugees/IDPs and also assists voluntary repatriation, resettlement and reintegration as durable solutions. In supporting refugees in a protracted humanitarian crisis, Japan also focuses on assistance that will benefit host countries and communities because accepting refugees puts excessive burden on them in terms of land, water, fuel and other resources required. The idea is to prevent possible friction between refugees/IDPs and host countries/communities as much as possible.

There is no significant difference between IDPs and refugees in terms of having been displaced from their homes and being in need of assistance, although IDPs do not cross a national border in the course of fleeing from a humanitarian crisis. In the past, assistance to IDPs was regarded primarily as a matter of internal affairs; it was not a main focus of international humanitarian assistance. Now the international community has embarked on the

⁴ Good Humanitarian Donorship is an initiative by donors to address problems with fund disbursement for humanitarian assistance by the international community (inadequate, geographically-uneven, and time-consuming disbursement) and deliver international humanitarian assistance more effectively through improved behavior. A total of 37 countries participated in the first meeting in June 2003, hosted by the Swedish government. They adopted an outcome document ([Principles-and-Good-Practice-of-Humanitarian-Donorship](#)).

⁵ The Oslo Guidelines were developed in 1994 by 45 countries--including Japan, the US, the UK, and Germany--and relevant international organizations, with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) playing a central role. The guidelines were updated in 2006 and 2007. The Guidelines set out basic principles on international emergency relief in natural disaster situations.

protection and assistance for IDPs in light of a rapid increase in the number of IDPs and worsening conditions surrounding them. Japan will continue to proactively provide humanitarian assistance to IDPs as well as to refugees.

(2) Smooth Transition

A smooth transition from emergency assistance in the wake of a humanitarian crisis to assistance for early reconstruction and further to development assistance for social stability and development over the mid- to long-term is essential to ensure that refugees/IDPs, once exposed to a humanitarian crisis, will be able to lead stable lives. Smooth transition is crucial also in the context of helping refugees/IDPs to stand on their own feet again so that they will not fall back into a situation in which they require humanitarian assistance. Japan strives for a smooth transition. This involves emergency assistance, including sending a Japan Disaster Relief team, in parallel with research and other preparations for reconstruction assistance immediately after the humanitarian crisis has occurred.

(3) Response to natural disasters

Natural disasters cause tremendous losses every year in many parts of the world. The Asian region is most prone to natural disasters; a majority of disaster-affected people in the world are concentrated in this region. Japan is no exception; it suffered unprecedented damage due to the earthquake and tsunami in the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Damage caused by natural disasters disrupts development outcomes, impedes sustainable development, and hinders human security in developing countries. That the poor are most vulnerable to such disasters makes it all the more important to protect them from such hazards, strengthen their preparedness, and build their capacity to cope with them.

The Government of Japan places the highest value on timely and effective delivery of humanitarian assistance that meets the needs of people affected by a natural disaster. Specifically, it works with the JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) to dispatch the Japan Disaster Relief Team to save lives and deliver emergency relief supplies in a timely manner. An optimal combination of these and other forms of assistance is sought for effective and flexible emergency assistance.

Efforts in normal times to be made by Japan – a country that has experienced numerous disasters and strengthened its preparedness against earthquakes and other disasters in both physical and non-physical aspects – include making good use of its extensive knowledge gained and valuable lessons learned from the Great East Japan Earthquake and other disasters in redoubling its efforts to strengthen its preparedness framework, as well as continuing to support international efforts for disaster reduction while sharing such knowledge and lessons with the international community that offered warm support for Japan after the disaster.

In concrete terms, the Government of Japan will work with UNISDR to promote further implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, the only global strategy on disaster reduction. It will also collaborate with UN organizations and countries concerned to host the third UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction, aimed at reviewing progress in the implementation of the framework and discussing a global disaster reduction strategy beyond 2015.

Japan will also support self-help efforts by developing countries in minimizing damage by natural disasters under the Initiative for Disaster Reduction through ODA, which sets out

Japan's basic policy in this field. To that end, Japan will provide a wide range of assistance at different levels. This will include support in introducing a focus on disaster reduction in development programs and projects, making buildings more quake-resistant, and raising awareness at the community level.

(4) Security of humanitarian aid workers

Since the end of the Cold War, conflicts have undergone significant qualitative changes. These changes include the diversification of the parties to a conflict, notably the engagement of non-state actors, and a blurred line between combatants and noncombatants. Increasingly, the civilian population bears the brunt of conflicts. Recent years have seen many cases where parties to a conflict fail to observe international humanitarian law and humanitarian aid workers become the target of attack in an armed conflict.

Inadequate safety of humanitarian aid workers or a shrinking "humanitarian space"⁶ has become a concern of the entire international community. Simply put, humanitarian space refers to an environment where humanitarian aid workers enjoy security and have access to the recipients. Ensuring humanitarian space is essential for delivering humanitarian assistance. For this reason, Japan will take every possible step to ensure the safety of humanitarian aid workers and calls on every party to comply with international humanitarian law.

As part of efforts in peace times, it is important to empower humanitarian aid workers in the fields of security and crisis management. The Regional Centre for Emergency Training in International Humanitarian Response, or eCentre, which was set up in 2000 within UNHCR Tokyo Office, provides security training for officials of governments in the Asia and Pacific Region, staff of international organizations, NGOs and other entities. Japan will continue to support the UNHCR eCentre, recognizing the value of its activities in ensuring the security of humanitarian aid workers.

Japan's continued support will also be extended to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which promotes international humanitarian law in both times of war and times of peace, among other activities.

(5) Civil-military coordination

International guidelines stipulate that humanitarian assistance should be implemented, in principle by civilians, and that the military assets can be utilized only where there is no comparable civilian alternative. Recent years have seen, however, growing opportunities for military assets to play an important role in delivering humanitarian assistance, notably in large-scale natural disasters.⁷

In such emergencies, civil-military coordination is important for timely and effective humanitarian assistance. With this in mind, Japan will actively participate in international dialogue and joint training in this field.

⁶ Humanitarian space is generally understood to mean a space that allows for neutral and independent humanitarian assistance. This concept was first put forward by Rony Brauman, a former President of Médecins Sans Frontières.

⁷ The case in point is Operation Tomodachi, a rescue and relief operation by the US Forces in the aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake.

5. Effectiveness and Efficiency

(1) Pursuing timely and efficient delivery

It is essential that humanitarian assistance be delivered in a timely and efficient manner in response to the needs on the ground. Consequently, Japan will make a final decision on its aid components, although it will also consider the objective assessments of the local needs by international organizations and other entities, requests from affected countries, and appeals by the UN. In the process, Japan will compare and weigh bilateral aid – including dispatch of relief teams, delivery of relief goods and financial contributions – and multilateral contributions through international organizations and combine them into a package as appropriate, with top priority given to timely and efficient delivery.

Coordination between multilateral and bilateral aid matters in humanitarian assistance as well. Japan will pursue such coordination to ensure that its bilateral humanitarian assistance will be consistent with international efforts to address global challenges and seek aid coordination.

In the case of a humanitarian crisis, international organizations that play an important role in humanitarian assistance should be given necessary funds as a matter of top priority. In this context, Japan will disburse funds to international organizations in a manner as timely and flexible as possible in such an emergency. In the process, Japan will take full account of UN consolidated appeals and other appeals by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, especially flash appeals.

The Government of Japan considers that Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)⁸, which pre-positions funding for emergency humanitarian assistance by UN humanitarian organizations, plays a significant role in speedily funding necessary resources for humanitarian agencies. Based on this recognition, the Government of Japan will continue to provide financial support to facilitate the use of CERF.

(2) Coordination with other humanitarian actors including NGOs

Various actors are involved in humanitarian assistance, including affected governments, donor countries, international organizations, the Red Cross and NGOs. Ensuring that these actors take advantage of their own strengths and coordinate with others for synergistic effects is essential for effective and efficient delivery of humanitarian assistance. Such mutual coordination is also important for accurately identifying the actual needs on the ground.

Based on this recognition, the Government of Japan will make efforts to build a close-knit network of donors that allows for better coordination with other actors. The Government of Japan will also support UNOCHA, a UN office responsible for coordination among all actors involving humanitarian assistance, in building its coordination capacity, in light of the importance of the coordination framework revolving around UNOCHA.

(3) The value of monitoring and evaluation

⁸ CERF was set up in March 2006 based on an agreement at the G8 Summit in Gleneagles in 2005 and an outcome document adopted in the 60th session of the UN General Assembly (the 2005 World Summit) in September of the same year. Its secretariat is within the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). The main task of CERF is to pre-position funding for emergency humanitarian assistance by UN humanitarian organizations in the case of a large-scale disaster or conflict.

Monitoring and evaluation have an important role to play in ensuring effective and efficient delivery of humanitarian assistance. The Government of Japan will monitor its delivery of humanitarian assistance, evaluate its outcomes, and feed the lessons learned back into policy making and aid delivery in this field. Through these processes, Japan will seek continuous qualitative improvement.

These processes may be impeded in some aspects when humanitarian assistance is implemented in an area where the political situation is highly unstable or humanitarian aid workers may face the risk of their lives or bodies being put in danger. In anticipation of such impediments, the Government of Japan will receive regular reporting from international organizations and its diplomatic missions in addition to the monitoring process for more accurate evaluation and effective feedback.

Steady and sustained delivery of humanitarian assistance requires that the public or the taxpayers fully understand the value and need for such aid. The Government of Japan will make humanitarian assistance more transparent and thus hold itself fully accountable to the public by proactively making the evaluation outcomes of assistance work and other relevant information available to the public.