



Regional Seminar on the Role of Customs in Natural Disaster Relief
May 8-10, 2012
Bangkok, Thailand

Seminar Report

Background

In May 2012, the World Customs Organization (WCO), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) held a joint seminar on the role of customs in natural disaster relief in the Asia Pacific region. This was the first in a series of regional seminars planned by the three organizations, as requested in the June 2011 resolution of the WCO's Customs Co-operation Council on the role of customs in natural disaster relief.

The seminar brought together over ninety participants from WCO member states in the Asia Pacific region. The participants included representatives from national customs administrations, national disaster management authorities, National Red Cross/Red Crescent (RCRC) societies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies, among others. These actors were brought together to share experiences and perspectives between customs authorities and key humanitarian partners, and to gain a full grasp of the measures to be implemented in emergency situations.

Welcome and Opening Remarks

The seminar was opened by representatives from each of the convening organizations, including Georges Cantone (Technical Attachè, WCO), Khun Sawanit Kongsiri (Assistant Secretary General for External Relations, Thai Red Cross Society) and Oliver Lacey-Hall (Head of OCHA's Asia Pacific Regional Office). In his opening remarks, Mr. Cantone outlined the aims of the seminar, particularly the need for customs administrations to be prepared to respond efficiently and effectively to emergencies, and to increase overall awareness among governments and humanitarian actors of the need for national regulations for international assistance in relief operations.

Khun Sawanit shared some perspectives from the Thai Red Cross Society, which has recently dealt with major flooding in Bangkok and the surrounding areas in 2011. He highlighted the timely nature of this seminar, given that the impacts of climate change are becoming more intense and creating more natural disasters. Khun Sawanit also stressed the importance of disaster preparedness and disaster relief as key areas of Red Cross/Red Crescent activities, and emphasized the need to coordinate with customs authorities on these issues.

Mr. Lacey-Hall from OCHA wrapped up the opening comments by reminding the group that 2011 saw a record number of natural disasters in the Asia-Pacific, and highlighted the efforts being made across the region to address this, including the establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Humanitarian Assistance Centre and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Disaster Management Centre. He also noted that the regional seminar serves

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as an important opportunity for participants to discuss the issues they have faced regarding the facilitation and clearance of disaster relief goods, and share any lessons learned which can be applied in the region and beyond.

Part One: Identifying the Challenges

Part one of the seminar provided an introduction to participants on the key customs challenges in disaster response operations. This session was chaired by Janggam Adhityawarma from the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Centre, and included presentations on the different operational challenges for international responders, customs officials, and national disaster management authorities.

In his overview of operational challenges for international responders, David Fisher (IFRC Disaster Law Coordinator) highlighted the key issues relating to the facilitation of disaster relief goods, including the legal barriers or 'red tape' that can get in the way of providing relief goods to the affected populations (including unnecessary delays, restrictions and costs), and issues regarding the provision of inappropriate relief items and poor coordination among responders. The main customs issues from the standpoint of international responders include clearance problems, imposition of taxes, duties and charges on humanitarian consignments, the amount of documentation required, inflexible hours and locations of customs offices, and burdensome exemption processes. Mr. Fisher highlighted the importance of putting national procedures in place to streamline the processes for the provision of relief goods and assistance.

Mr Hantyo Pranolo from the Indonesia Customs Facility and Mr Sagar Mishra from the Nepal Ministry of Home Affairs provided their perspectives on the key operational challenges for their respective agencies. Several common issues were identified by Mr. Pranolo and Mr. Mishra, including a lack of awareness among the relevant authorities of the relevant customs regulations and procedures, lengthy formalities and clearance procedures, an over-abundance of incoming relief items and inadequate staff to process these donations, and a lack of formalized re-exportation procedures for temporarily imported items. These presenters also outlined how their existing disaster management laws tend to be more focused on relief procedures rather than preparedness.

Participants were then divided into groups and given the opportunity to share the most important challenges they had encountered with respect to international disaster response operations, and discuss which aspects concern them the most for future operations. The main challenges and concerns identified by the groups were similar to those discussed during the formal presentations. These included:

- a lack of coordination among actors;
- ad hoc customs procedures;
- uncertainty concerning customs clearance procedures in emergency settings (e.g. required documentation) and;
- the lack of capacity of some customs authorities to respond as quickly as desired when under extreme pressure.

Part Two: The International Legal Framework

The second part of the seminar focused on the international legal framework for disaster response, and the key legal instruments. Soraya Tungchitviriyant from the Thai Customs Department chaired the first session, which highlighted key international instruments, including:

- Special Annex J.5 of the Revised Kyoto Convention on the Harmonization and Simplification of Customs Procedures;
- Annex B.9 of the Istanbul Convention on Temporary Admission;
- UN/ WCO Model Agreement on Customs Facilitation; and
- the Guidelines for the Domestic Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance (adopted by the state parties to the Geneva Conventions in 2007, and also known as the “IDRL Guidelines”).

Other relevant agreements at the international and regional levels were also highlighted. Participants were given the opportunity during this session to assess the existing international legal framework, in light of the challenges identified in Part One of the seminar, and to discuss what they considered to be the main strengths and weaknesses of this framework.

The participants’ overall assessment of the impact of the existing international legal framework focused largely on areas of weakness. Among the most important of these was not related to the substance of the existing framework, but rather a lack of communication and awareness about it at the operational, policy and donor levels. Others considered a lack of training and capacity building of customs officials (due to the lack of funding) to be a central concern. The group also acknowledged that complicated bureaucratic procedures and a lack of coordination are still causing delays in the clearance and delivery of relief items, and that while national laws may be in place, they are not always well implemented. The need to recognise the differing capacities of states to effectively implement the international framework was also highlighted, together with concerns over enforcement and the potential for abuse of relaxed procedures by assisting organizations or others. Regarding what they thought were the strengths of the existing international framework, the participants acknowledged that the framework contains good measures which will help to simplify procedures and potentially reduce operational costs. They considered the framework comprehensive and inclusive of different perspectives.

Part Three: The International Humanitarian System

Part three of the seminar focused on the international humanitarian system, and included an introduction to the international coordination system for disaster relief; an outline of the international disaster response systems of the Red Cross and Red Crescent (RCRC); and an update on the Asia Pacific regional system for disaster response. This session was chaired by the Secretary General of the Maldivian Red Crescent Society, Ms. Rasheeda Ali.

In her presentation on the disaster response system of the RCRC, Ms. Isabelle Sechaud (IFRC Field Logistics Unit Manager) outlined how the IFRC facilitates the reception and distribution of relief goods, and provided examples of how National RCRC Societies, the IFRC, and governments work together in this process. This was followed by an explanation of the way in which the regional system for disaster response operates in Southeast Asia, provided by Janggam Adhityawarma from the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Centre. Mr. Adhityawarma explained how the ASEAN

Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) was developed in order to enhance collaboration and solidarity between ASEAN member states in humanitarian response operations, and serves as a common platform for responding to disasters within the ASEAN region. The AADMER also aims to regulate the transit of personnel and disaster relief goods and equipment. In terms of improving the ASEAN regional mechanisms for disaster response, Mr. Adhityawarma outlined that connections need to be strengthened between member states, and more awareness and capacity building needs to take place at both the regional and international levels.

Mr. Markus Werne from UN OCHA gave an introduction to the international coordination system for disaster relief, explaining the way in which the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) brings together global agencies to coordinate humanitarian action after natural disasters. He outlined key coordination tools, such as the global cluster system, which aims to strengthen partnerships and responses to humanitarian emergencies through enhancing coordination and clarifying the roles and responsibilities of international humanitarian responders.

Part three of the seminar also involved the participants taking part in a scenario exercise, where they were asked to discuss a hypothetical disaster situation and identify the key customs and facilitation issues. They were also asked to identify the relevant legal instruments which could be utilized in addressing these issues from a set of related instruments given to them at the seminar. The exercise provided an opportunity for participants to discuss the issues related to the facilitation and regulation of disaster relief that may arise after a disaster, and relate their knowledge and experiences to the hypothetical scenario. It also served as an opportunity to provide participants with a basic familiarity of the range of relevant international and regional instruments, and open up discussion how these instruments may (or may not) be relevant to their decision-making in a disaster situation.

Part Four: National Legislation, Procedures and Plans

National legislation, procedures and plans were the focus of part four of the seminar, which included a panel discussion on 'experiences with national law for facilitating the entry of international disaster relief goods and equipment'. The panel was chaired by Mr. Loti Yates, Director of the Solomon Islands National Disaster Management Office. Mr. Masaya Deguchi from the Embassy of Japan in Thailand presented on the procedural measures taken by Japan Customs for facilitating the recovery from the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011. Mr. Deguchi highlighted that the Japanese government was not required to modify or set aside laws on a temporary basis in the wake of the earthquake because procedural measures that were required to facilitate disaster assistance were already in place. These included measures to ensure exemptions from duties, simplified clearance procedures, waiver of inspection fees, and acceptance of customs declarations at any convenient office among others. He also emphasised that, during emergencies, it is in the interests of governments to ensure the quick facilitation of disaster relief in order to save lives, and how this was a key priority in Japan after the quake.

Mr. Achmad Djaelani from Pelang Merah Indonesia (Indonesia Red Cross Society) presented on his National Society's experience in dealing with the entry and clearance of relief goods and equipment, and the key challenges facing Indonesia in this respect. Indonesia has significant experience in dealing with the clearance and facilitation of relief goods, given that it has suffered from four major disasters in the past decade, the most devastating of which was the 2004 tsunami. Mr. Djaelani highlighted the main laws which Indonesia has in place to facilitate disaster relief (namely disaster management law No. 24, which was introduced after the tsunami and its implementing regulations),

and how these laws have been effective in disaster situations. He also identified some remaining challenges, including problems associated with the importation of food and medical items (which often require sign off from multiple ministries), incorrect or inadequate labelling and document of relief items by donors, abrupt changes in rules beyond a short “emergency period”, and a lack of communication among different actors involved.

The IFRC’s Disaster Law Programme Coordinator, Mr. David Fisher, provided a brief outline of the Pilot Model Act for the Facilitation and Regulation of International Disaster Relief and Initial Recovery Assistance (‘the Pilot Model Act’), and how this can be incorporated into national legislation. The Pilot Model Act was developed by the IFRC in cooperation with OCHA and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), in response to requests from governments on how to incorporate the IDRL Guidelines into their national legal frameworks and for examples of ‘legislative language’. Mr. Fisher outlined the purpose and scope of the model act, and reiterated that it is still a working document and subject to further consultation and amendments. Participants were asked to share their thoughts on how much detail their national laws should have about the facilitation and regulation of customs treatment of disaster relief; where provisions for the facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief would best be placed within their national laws; whether their national laws and procedures distinguish between different types of importers of disaster relief and; whether the Pilot Model Act’s approach, as described, would have been useful in previous emergencies.

Whereas the Pilot Model Act had been made available prior to the seminar through OCHA’s “virtual OSOCC” web site, most participants had not had the chance to review it in detail. Nevertheless, they articulated that, while these issues obviously depend on the political system within each state, national laws should ideally contain provisions addressing the areas highlighted in the presentation. . Some suggested that national laws should be kept brief, and that further detail can be outlined in additional protocols or standard operating procedures (SoPs). Some participants also suggested that customs related issues should be reflected clearly in national disaster management laws, and that these should be clearly aligned with customs laws and procedures. It was thought that national laws and procedures should make clear distinctions between different types of importers, and to provide legal facilities to local and international humanitarian organizations. Some participants were concerned that an act based entirely on international assistance may not work so well in practice or would not likely be adopted. Overall, however, the group considered that a model act could be a useful tool at least for starting policy discussions.

These discussions were followed by a panel session on customs and national emergency plans, chaired by Mr. Lee Sang-Hyup from WCO’s regional office in Bangkok. Ms. Virginie Bohl from OCHA provided an overview of the key elements required to implement the agreement on customs facilitation in emergency response between the United Nations and a Government/State. These include the need for distinct action plans on “who is doing what, when, where and how”. Ms. Bohl outlined how these emergency response plans should be activated as soon as the emergency is declared, in view of the arrival of the international humanitarian assistance. She also discussed the training modules which provide customs officials with basic knowledge and skills regarding the customs treatment given to humanitarian aid.

This was followed by presentations from Ms. Rubina Wasti from the Pakistan Customs Collectorate and Mr. Chawanvith Soontorncharoenwong from the Legal Bureau Office at the Thai Customs Department. Ms. Wasti and Mr. Soontorncharoenwong provided an overview of each of their countries’ experiences with customs procedures in disaster relief operations, and identified the key

challenges and recommendations for improvement of their national systems. The key customs challenges in Pakistan, as identified by Ms. Wasti, included:

- a lack of awareness among donors of customs formalities and procedures;
- inadequate documentation provided to support the importation of relief goods by donors and assisting agencies;
- a lack of capacity of Pakistan Customs to process large-scale relief consignments in an emergency.

Ms. Wasti also provided some suggested recommendations for improving customs procedures in Pakistan, including:

- implementing the measures contained in Specific Annex J.5 of the Revised Kyoto Convention;
- ratifying annex B.9 of the Istanbul Convention;
- Developing a training program to ensure that all customs staff receive adequate training to manage and implement the national emergency plan and;
- Managing borders in an efficient and coordinated manner, particularly through the sharing of information among key stakeholders.

Regarding the main customs challenges in Thailand, Mr. Soontorncharoenwong cited the lack of regulations pertaining specifically to the clearance of relief items after disasters. He outlined that the current framework in Thailand (more specifically, the “Act Amending the Customs Tariff Decree”) does not recognise disaster relief consignments as a specific category for which to expedite customs clearances processes. This issue was highlighted after the 2011 floods in Thailand, where organizations not recognised as ‘government organizations’ or ‘public charity organizations’, as specified in the Act, were not exempted from paying customs duties on donated relief goods. The Thai Customs department is currently working with the Legal Bureau Office to amend the decree and make it more inclusive, by adding an additional category which waives any “economic export prohibitions or restrictions” on the importation of relief consignments, disaster relief personnel and their possessions.

After these presentations, the participants were asked to gather together in small groups to assess the main strengths and weaknesses of their national legal, procedural and institutional systems related to the entry of relief goods and equipment. Participants identified several commonalities among the strengths and weaknesses of their national systems. In terms of strengths, these included the fact that most states are signatories to the main customs-related conventions, i.e., the Istanbul Convention and Kyoto Convention (though not necessarily of their disaster-specific annexes), that many states already have existing disaster management acts which include provisions for facilitating disaster relief (or could incorporate such provisions where they are absent). In terms of weaknesses, participants cited a lack of communication and coordination between customs and national disaster management authorities; the fact that customs procedures are not always in line with international obligations; that relief providers are often unaware of customs procedures and formalities; and a general lack of enforcement of the relevant rules and procedures.

Part Five: Coordinated Border Management and Partnerships

Part five of the regional seminar focused on coordinated border management and partnerships, and examined how to strengthen partnerships between customs authorities and key actors in disaster response, including national disaster management authorities, National Red Cross Red Crescent Societies, international partners and other international representative bodies such as OCHA, WCO

and IFRC. Mr. Georges Cantone from the WCO provided an introduction to the principles of coordinated border management ('CBM'), which have been developed due to increasing concerns from governments about border security and methods for border management. Mr. Cantone explained how the border sector is facing increased security challenges due to transitional organized crime, terrorism, pandemics etc, and therefore requires a more structured and secure approach, which still takes into account the need to deliver fast and effective relief to affected populations after disasters.

Mr. Roslan Mohd Yasin shared some insights from the Malaysia customs perspective on transit procedures related to disaster relief in the context of CBM. When it comes to natural disasters, Mr. Yasin explained, the priority is to deliver relief goods as quickly as possible, as this can impact significantly the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. He emphasised how it is imperative that customs administrations be as flexible as possible and be prepared to rapidly clear goods that are being sent as aid. Mr Yasin also reiterated that customs procedures should not be an obstacle in disaster situations, but should facilitate the process to the maximum extent possible within the confines of national laws.

Ms. Natasha Freeman from the Australian Red Cross later presented on cross-border relief from the donor perspective. Ms. Freeman outlined how to work with corporate, government and public donors, and what processes need to be undertaken, such as conducting a needs assessment in order to identify and provide the appropriate goods and support. Ms. Freeman emphasized the importance of ensuring that donors avoid sending unnecessary or inappropriate relief items, and that this requires some reflection and care notwithstanding the urgency that comes with a disaster situation.

Following the presentations, the participants were divided into groups to discuss how to strengthen the key partnerships between customs authorities and the relevant actors, in order to improve the facilitation and clearance of disaster relief goods and equipment. Their suggestions for strengthening these relationships can be summarized as follows:

Between customs authorities and national disaster management authorities:

- Establish coordination mechanisms with clear roles and responsibilities.
- Outline these coordination mechanisms, roles and responsibilities in national laws and procedures.
- Develop shared learning processes and joint simulation events.
- Hold regular meetings and discussions.

Between customs authorities and National Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies:

- National Societies can undertake reviews of the relevant customs procedures and identify gaps – then present and discuss these with customs authorities.
- Develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) or Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) which explicitly outline the roles and responsibilities of government actors and the National Society in disaster preparedness and response.
- Hold regular coordination meetings (also with the NDMA).

Between customs authorities and international partners:

- Identify focal points within the relevant international organizations to lead coordination with government agencies.
- Share information, experiences and challenges so that customs authorities are aware of these and can improve their processes accordingly.

- Hold regional and national seminars to discuss key issues and challenges.

Overall, the participants considered that there was a strong need to improve the level of awareness, training and collaboration of governments (including internally between customs and disaster management authorities) and Red Cross/Red Crescent actors. It was also suggested that international organizations can continue to assist with this process by bringing together the actors involved in disaster response and sensitizing them to the key customs issues.

Next Steps

During the final session of the seminar, the participants were asked to group together in country delegations and formulate elements of a plan of action for moving forward on addressing the challenges identified over the course of the programme. They were asked to prepare short-term, immediate steps, as well as long-term plans for the future. These plans of action are attached to this report in Annex A. It is hoped that the outcomes from this workshop will be shared with government and National Society colleagues, and that significant progress will be made to achieve the goals put forward in the plans of action.

Evaluation

At the conclusion of the seminar, participants were asked to complete a brief evaluation form regarding the content and structure of the seminar. Overall, the feedback was very positive, with many participants rating the seminar as “excellent”. Most participants also found the seminar to be a useful, learning experience. Some general comments and recommendations for improvement are summarized as follows:

- The seminar was well-structured but could include more group discussions according to regional or country groupings.
- It would be worth having representations from customs, NDMA and red cross/red crescent (RCRC) from the same countries on one table, to work through the issues together.
- In the future, include another panel with the NDMA, customs and RCRC representatives from the same country, together with an international responder, to speak about realities on the ground in one particular disaster situation.
- The speakers from the donor side need to speak more about their experiences with various governments (customs and NDMA) and the difficulties faced by them when dealing with government agencies.
- National seminars should be held as a follow-up to the regional seminar, and all relevant national stakeholders invited.
- Improve the structure/format of the reporting segments during the seminar e.g. through the use of flipcharts. These segments need to be more engaging.

- Future seminars like this one should be convened, but focusing on more specific customs issues.
- Include a wider variety of government stakeholders in future seminars, e.g. port authorities
- The first day of the seminar should be kept light on content, and less ‘hectic’, so that participants do not feel overwhelmed with information.
- Soft copies of the materials should be sent beforehand so participants can do some preparatory “homework”. This will also help participants to be informed and familiar with the materials discussed.
- More RCRC experiences could be shared (however, it was also suggested to “bring together a wider variety of humanitarian partners e.g. more INGOs/NGOs to make it less ‘red cross-centric’”). Event organizers therefore need to find a balance in this respect.
- The participants should be made to change tables in the plenary session each day, in order to have wider discussions and share more experiences with each other.
- A regional seminar should be held with a Pacific focus.
- Communication among the facilitators could be improved.
- Seminars like this should be held more frequently e.g. twice a year in, order to establish continuity and ensure that participants do follow-up on the issues discussed.
- Future workshops should include more case study examples, given the large number and range of participants.

The average scores from the numerical feedback questions, on a scale of 1 – 5 (1 being “poor” and 5 being “excellent”), are summarized as follows:

Question 1: Overall, how would you rate the seminar? Average score = 4.47

Question 2: How was the content? Did you find it clear and useful? Average score = 4.23

Question 3: How did you find the structure and flow of the seminar? Average score = 4.45

Annex A: Country Plans of Action

Afghanistan

Short term:

- Hold coordination meetings among related national stakeholders.
- Conduct training meetings and simulation exercises for key stakeholders.
- Present proposals for changes in legislation.

Long term:

- Amend existing rules and regulations.
- Make changes to the composition of coordination/working groups within the NDMA, customs authorities and international organizations.

Australia

Short term:

- Report back to Australian Red Cross (ARC) about the discussions/outcomes of the regional seminar.
- Include NDMO and customs authorities in disaster response training in the Pacific and elsewhere, particularly where trainings have a logistics component.
- Advocate for more joint simulation events.
- Identify forums where there may be opportunities to further educate key stakeholders.
- Check within the ARC as to who is best placed to be responsible for these components of disaster preparedness and response.

Long term:

- In cooperation with the ARC's International Humanitarian Law team, address whether Australia is effectively prepared for disasters from an international border perspective.
- Also look at what responsibilities Australia has towards:
 - Advocating for appropriate donations
 - Educating Australian donors
 - Ensuring that goods exported from Australia are appropriate, particularly in times of a disaster.

ASEAN (regional perspective)

Short term:

- Develop consolidated online emergency operation tools, accessible by all member states.
- Hold regular regional meetings for key stakeholders to encourage knowledge sharing and to address customs issues (at least once a year).

Long term:

- Develop an online regional database tool which includes the focal points for each member state and the relevant customs/disaster management laws and procedures. The database should also include international guidelines, laws and best practices.
- Develop consolidated online mapping credentials or related attributes consisting of ports of entry, warehouse and stockpiles, technical expertise relation law and emergency logistics operations.
- OCHA/IFRC/WCO to provide specific regional needs-based training.

Bangladesh

Short term:

- Establish a strong coordination mechanism (including the establishment of key focal points) within one year so that the role and responsibilities of different actors is clearly outlined and understood.
- Customs authorities should take necessary roles and action in line with international guidelines and principles.
- All necessary rules and regulations should be made available in line with the national disaster management act. All circulars should be distributed among key stakeholders within the shortest possible time.

Long term:

- A needs-based analysis should be conducted with support from the WCO, OCHA and IFRC.
- Bangladesh will consider taking the necessary actions to ratify the relevant international conventions.

Bhutan

Short term:

- The disaster management bill should be enacted by parliament in June/July 2012.
- Key stakeholders and parties involved in the facilitation of disaster relief goods should be sensitized and familiarized with the UN Model Agreement, especially customs authorities.
- Stakeholders, including customs officials, should be informed about key international conventions and the relevant provisions on the facilitation of disaster relief consignments.
- Customs should develop a legal backing requirement for the clearance of relief consignments during disasters.
- Customs should coordinate with the NDMA and other relevant stakeholders.
- A clear understanding of the relevant international conventions to which Bhutan is a party should be ensured among customs authorities.

Long term:

- Once the disaster management bill has been enacted, detailed rules and regulations should be drawn up and the role of customs in disaster relief should be clearly delineated.
- UN bodies and other relevant agencies should be requested to develop training programmes for customs officials as well as NDMA personnel.
- A permanent focal point for this topic should be appointed in accordance with the disaster management act.

Cambodia

Short term:

- Report to government on the discussions and outcomes of the regional seminar – make recommendations to the government.
- Hold a meeting between the customs department, Cambodia Red Cross, and the NDMC to discuss the issues raised at the seminar.
- Hold capacity building and training exercises for relevant stakeholders.

Long term:

- Develop a MoU and joint statement of collaboration on this issue between the Cambodia Red Cross, customs and the NDMC.
- Ensure the effective implementation of the MoU.
- Set up an emergency relief task force (develop terms of reference for this)
- Improve contingency planning (develop new SoPs).

Fiji

Short term:

- Try to encourage a role for customs on the national disaster management committee. At present there is no mention of customs.

Long term:

- Establish a MoU between the customs department and the NDMA for the expedited clearance of relief goods.

Habitat for Humanity

Short term:

- Share summary of the seminar proceedings with senior management.
- Follow-up with the Community of Practice (CoP) on DRR.
- Share, coordinate and discuss key issues with priority countries/NDMAs/customs authorities in the Asia Pacific (e.g. India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand).

Long term:

- Hold a joint seminar/workshop to plan for future action.
- Identify the relevant instruments for sharing and implementation by country offices.
- Ensure that all priority countries have their customs plans integrated in their countries' disaster management or DRR plans.

ICRC:

Short term:

- Prepare a report and recommendations for decision makers within the organization.
- Formulate a strategy on how to move forward on this issue within the RCRC movement.

Long term:

- Help to develop a Movement approach on this issue.
- Engage in a dialogue with governments and include ongoing bilateral and multilateral discussions.
- Follow-up and coordinate responses within the Movement.

IFRC

Short term:

- Prepare report from regional seminar.
- Prepare similar workshop for the Americas and Africa, drawing on the experience and expertise at the Asia Pacific workshop.
- Discuss with logistics and WCO about including the customs codes in the emergency relief catalogue.
- Develop a model emergency decree on IDRL.
- Support National Societies to disseminate the IDRL guidelines and provide advice to governments on law and policy.

Long term:

- Develop a dedicated training module for customs and natural disasters with OCHA and WCO.
- Develop additional guidance on regulations/SoPs for use with customs and disasters.
- Participate in discussions at the international level on improving quality control in humanitarian relief.

- Support the development of new laws and regulations upon requests in several countries in the region.
- Develop materials for joint simulation exercises at the regional level.
- Prepare a global progress report for the 32nd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

India

Short term:

- Submit report on the outcomes of the regional seminar, highlighting the key issues discussed.
- Meet with the Head of the Policy Wing of the customs department and share a copy of the seminar report. Communicate to him the shortcomings of India's national law on disaster management.
- Appraise the disaster management authority of India about the issues flagged at the seminar.

Long term:

- The international agencies, such as OCHA, WCO, IFRC etc, should target specific countries and initiate a dialogue about entering into the relevant legal agreements.
- Coordinated border management procedures should be improved, and states should move towards incorporating the model act in their national legal frameworks. National Red Cross Red Crescent Societies should also be involved in this process.

Indonesia

Short term:

- Conduct an integrated regional workshop and tabletop exercise.
- Review and revise current SoPs for receiving international disaster relief goods.
- Formulate a decree from the Finance Minister about tax/duty exemptions on international assistance.
- Familiarize relevant stakeholders with procedures for customs clearance.

Long term:

- Advocate to the government to ratify the Istanbul Convention and the Revised Kyoto Convention.

Iran

Short term:

- Improve communication and coordination with other organizations and stakeholders including organizing training courses in cooperation with OCHA, IFRC etc

Long term:

- Establish a joint regional office and extend to subcommittees – Iran is prepared to establish a subcommittee in Tehran.
- Adopt international standards and guidelines into national laws, and ensure they are implemented well.
- Modernize customs procedures and improve IT infrastructures for better information-sharing and delivery at national and regional levels.

Laos

Short term:

- Report to the government/concerned ministries about the discussions at the seminar.

Long term:

- Undertake a consultation process among the relevant line ministries about future activities to improve the facilitation of disaster relief and delivery of disaster relief goods and items.
- Appoint a focal point/person from the concerned agencies e.g. NDMA, Customs, Red Cross etc to maintain regular contact and coordination on this matter.
- Request that international bodies (e.g. IFRC, OCHA, and WCO) hold a national-level workshop on the international tools and instruments relevant to customs and disaster response.
- Organise a meeting on this topic to raise public awareness and gather comments and recommendations.
- Amend or develop draft legislation or a decree according to these recommendations. Submit this to the concerned government for adoption.
- Widely disseminate the adopted legislation and decree to the public.

Malaysia***Government*****Short term:**

- Prepare a report regarding the issue of handling disaster relief goods at the point of entry or exit.
- Develop an awareness program to inform staff at the entry and exit points.

Long term:

- Initiate/improve the working relationship with the National Security Council in Malaysia.

Mercy Malaysia**Short term:**

- Collect and consolidate the existing customs regulations and acts with regards to entry and exit of relief consignments.
- Strengthen communication with relevant customs officials, particularly at entry points and border crossings.
- Strengthen the network with UN agencies and IFRC/National Societies.
- Identify and establish contact with the focal person dealing with clearance of relief consignments.
- Ensure that organizations like Mercy Malaysia have their names listed in the customs directory as a humanitarian player.

Long term:

- Include customs representatives in all national/international humanitarian conferences organized by Mercy Malaysia.
- Develop and establish a framework or SoPs for dealing with customs in the handling of relief consignments.
- Include customs and other relevant departments' roles in disaster relief/humanitarian simulation exercises so that customs roles can be considered too.

Maldives**Short term:**

- Identify the issues of relevance to disaster management authorities in relation to the facilitation and clearance of relief consignments.
- Identify common areas for better coordination with the agencies and stakeholders concerned.
- Provide feedback on the discussions and outcomes of the seminar.

- Advocate for the establishment of a coordination committee, which would include the NDMC, Customs and the Maldivian Red Crescent (MRC).
- Establish a mechanism/procedure for regular communication and information sharing between the NDMC, customs and MRC (this could be through the coordination committee).
- Conduct awareness/sensitization programs for customs personnel on their roles and responsibilities with regard to disaster relief and the relevant international instruments.
- Obtain technical expertise to review relevant laws and regulations to strengthen them in the context of disaster relief.
- Develop a MoU between customs and the MRC to give priority to expediting humanitarian assistance in disaster situations.

Long term:

- Finalize and adopt the national disaster management law.
- Remove any areas of overlap with other laws.
- Develop Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) in relation to relief consignments.
- Assign a focal point within the NDMA and customs department to coordinate on issues regarding the facilitation and entry/clearance of disaster relief goods.
- Advocate/assist in amending the Customs Act, so that it includes provisions for the facilitation of international disaster relief.

Mongolia

Short term:

- Hold a meeting at the director's level with the relevant national agencies.
- Establish a focal point within the government for this issue.
- Develop and MoU between customs, the national disaster management authority and the Mongolian Red Cross to work together on these issues.

Long term:

- Improve national regulations

Nepal

Short term:

- Launch IDRL study report.
- Incorporate international assistance system within NDRF 2012.
- Share the International assistance mechanism for humanitarian operations in the upcoming national workshop on disaster preparedness and response planning.
- Assign a focal person for disaster management within the customs department (subject to Ministry of Finance).

Long term:

- Disseminate the Model Customs Agreement and IDRL study report at three different customs points.

New Zealand

Short term:

- Identify the relevant customs officials.
- Identify the key issues/challenges for New Zealand and map out processes to overcome these challenges.
- Share information from the regional seminar with key stakeholders.
- Develop a suitable training module.
- Ensure that customs officials are involved in natural disaster simulation exercises at the national and regional levels).

Long term:

- Develop long-term recommendations for the improvement of customs processes.
- Support the inclusion of customs in regional training exercises.

Pakistan**Short term:**

- Hold government coordination meetings on a quarterly basis.
- Improve information sharing regarding rules and regulations.
- Information should be shared regarding the documentation required for expedited customs procedures.
- Customs authorities should conduct training exercises to raise awareness about international rules and regulations re: the facilitation of customs procedures for relief operations.
- All of the relevant international tools that have already been incorporated into customs procedures should be disseminated to the NDMA and other disaster relief organizations so that they are aware of them.
- All the relevant rules and regulations should be published in a booklet and circulated with the relevant government and non-government stakeholders.

Long term:

- Formulate a strategy to ensure disaster relief goods are released without undue delay.
- This strategy can be developed for future modus operandi in the context of immediate clearance of goods in case of emergencies.
- A dedicated task force should be established to facilitate and regulate disaster relief. Both customs and the NDMA should have a focal point within this task force.

Papua New Guinea**Short term:**

- Develop a MoU with the NDMA and initiate a consultative dialogue – hold regular meetings. Make sure customs are included in this process.
- Conduct joint training/awareness in country-exercises and enhance awareness of customs systems and procedures.
- Develop SoPs to ensure that roles are clear in the event of a disaster.

Long term:

- With the assistance of international organizations, undertake a review of the relevant national legislation in order to be more effective in disaster management and coordination.

Philippines**Short term:**

- Report on the discussions/outcomes of the regional seminar to the head of customs bureau and request that the information be disseminated to lower levels within the bureau.
- Share or develop customs procedures with the NDMA and Philippine Red Cross.
- Lobby with legislative bodies to allocate funds to support humanitarian relief efforts.
- Improve education and awareness around customs obligations and procedures in disaster situations.

Long term:

- Lobby for the implementation and institutionalization of the relevant international legal frameworks.
- Simplify customs procedures.
- Develop a common form/certificate for the clearance of relief goods.

Samoa

Short term:

- Report to the NDMO on the discussions/outcomes of the regional seminar.
- Invite the UN and other key stakeholders to monthly meetings with the NDMO.
- Explore relationships and affiliations between customs authorities and the WCO – find out if there are systems for communication in place.

Long term:

- Build better relationships among key stakeholders.
- Utilize concepts of the RCRC (IFRC) such as Strategy 2020, HD, the auxiliary role of NSs, Disaster Law, to advocate for the role of customs in natural disasters.
- NSs should advocate to Pacific Island leaders at the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) on issues relating to the role of customs in natural disaster relief.
- Incorporate a role for customs in the National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP).
- Develop a MoU between customs and the relevant agencies (NSs etc) through NDMO coordination.

Solomon Islands

Long term:

- Review DRM arrangements and conduct a stakeholder consultation. Identify potential changes, hold a workshop and finalize a new draft of the arrangements.
- Review the NRM Act (1989), including consultations with the Attorney-General's chambers and public forums.

Sri Lanka

Short term:

- Make contact with the local Red Cross and NDMA and appraise the outcome of this seminar. Present them with soft copies of the materials shared.
- Suggest “the role of customs in natural disaster” as one of the customs subjects in the Sri Lanka Customs Policy Planning Division so all future deliberations are coordinated systematically.
- Try to arrange along with HRD, OCHA and the SL Red Cross a short awareness seminar targeting customs officers.
- Prepare, along the lines of the relevant international instruments, a simplified customs procedure within the present law to facilitate the entry of relief goods in the event of the next disaster.
- Make sure the acquired material will get a place in our new customs library in a special folder.

Long term:

- Study various international instruments and try to draft suitable legal amendments and necessary regulations within the disaster management law, customs law, and other related laws.
- Initiate a dialogue with the NDMA and other related government authorities to study the draft amendments to the local law.
- Maintain contact with UN OCHA, IFRC and WCO, share updated information, and prepare periodical reports to the higher management levels within the SL customs administration.
- Try to organize a national seminar on this subject to resolve the remaining issues.

Thailand

Short term:

- Initiate the national draft action plan relevant to relief consignments (in process).
- Build a virtual working group to facilitate the relief cooperation (include both national and international contact points, and share best practices and training).
- WCO, IFRC and OCHA need to provide support in identifying who can address these issues at the national level.
- Appoint focal points from all concerned agencies e.g. NDMA, Thai Red Cross, Customs/Immigration, UN/international organizations, INGO's, local NGOs etc.
- Draft/review SoPs on the facilitation of disaster relief.
- Hold a 'lessons learned' workshop from previous disaster experience in Thailand.

Long term:

- Improve information sharing among both international and national organizations in forums and meetings.
- Organize regular coordination meetings (e.g. on a quarterly basis).
- Undertake capacity building exercises (trainings, simulation exercises, study visits etc).
- Conduct an annual training exercise at the national level.
- Develop an education program for donors and receivers.
- Develop and MoU for cooperation with all relevant stakeholders.

Timor Leste

Short term:

- Report on the outcomes of this meeting to Director of Timor Leste Red Cross.
- Disseminate information on IDRL to the government.

Long term:

- Improve and build upon coordination relationships with key partners such as NDMA, customs, National Society etc.
- Seek advice from the WCO, OCHA and IFRC to draft a legal framework to incorporate the relevant parts of the IDRL Guidelines into national customs law.
- Develop a MoU and a SoP with the government Ministry of Health and Ministry of Finance.

Tonga

Short term:

- Report to supervisors on the outcomes of the regional seminar.
- Meet with local stakeholders to disseminate information about the main customs concerns.
- Increase advocacy and awareness of customs-related issues.

Long term:

- Prepare customs SoPs for the facilitation of relief consignments.
- Revise Customs legislation and align with international agreements/commitments.
- Revise the NDMO regulations.

Union of Myanmar

Short term:

- The Myanmar government adopted a short term plan for 2010-2011. This plan is called the "Myanmar action plan on disaster risk reduction". The Ministry of relief and resettlement helped develop this action plan. Customs authorities should follow the guidelines, which were disseminated as part of this action plan.

Vanuatu

Short term:

- Report to customs authorities on the outcomes of the regional seminar and share any relevant feedback.

Long term:

- Involve customs officials in disaster management training/simulation exercises.
- Request that the NDMO ask the customs department to dedicate a focal point to be a member of the NSC.
- Involve customs officials in disaster management activities.

Vietnam

Short term:

- Submit a report on the discussions and outcomes of the regional seminar to the leadership of the Vietnam Red Cross and to the government.
- Organize a meeting between the Vietnam Red Cross, the NDMA and NCD (customs) to discuss the issues raised at the seminar.

Long term:

- Persuade the government to adopt an act or decree on disaster management, which includes provisions for expedited customs procedures and the facilitation of international disaster relief.