



HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Emergency Measures

In the event of a natural disaster (for example, an earthquake) and similar catastrophes (for example, a burst dam), aid to those affected by such catastrophes obviously needs to be delivered and moved across international boundaries efficiently and expeditiously. The effectiveness of humanitarian assistance is dependent to a large extent on the speed with which it can be furnished. It is therefore imperative that Customs administrations be as facilitative as possible and be prepared to clear goods rapidly that, as a result of catastrophic events, are being forwarded as aid.

General measures

The following provisions apply to the Customs formalities involved in the clearance of relief consignments, at any stage of their transportation, be it at exportation, during transit or at importation:

- ❖ Clearance of relief consignments for export, transit, temporary admission and import shall be carried out as a matter of priority;
- ❖ Clearance of relief consignments should be granted without regard to the country of origin, the country from which arrived or country of destination;
- ❖ Lodging of a simplified Goods Declaration or of a provisional or incomplete Goods Declaration subject to completion of the declaration within a specified period;
- ❖ Clearance outside the designated hours of business or away from Customs offices and the waiver of any charges in this respect;
- ❖ If the goods must be inspected by other competent authorities and the Customs also schedules an examination, the Customs shall ensure that the inspections are coordinated and, if possible, carried out at the same time;
- ❖ Examination and/or sampling of goods only in exceptional circumstances;
- ❖ Generally, when Customs is clearing relief consignments, Customs control should be restricted to the absolute minimum necessary to ensure compliance with the laws and regulations which Customs are responsible for enforcing; and
- ❖ In the application of Customs control, Customs shall use risk management.

It is also recommended that Governments sign the United Nations Agreement concerning measures to expedite the import, export and transit of relief consignments and possessions of relief personnel in the event of disasters and emergencies.

Export

It is recommended:

- ❖ To waive any economic export prohibitions or restrictions, and any export duties or taxes, in respect of goods contained in relief consignments destined to countries having suffered disasters;

- ❖ To accept at exportation, as a general rule, the written summary declarations made out by the exporters of relief consignments as evidence of the contents and of the intended use of such consignments;
- ❖ To take such steps as may be necessary in order that the Customs authorities of the exporting country may be in a position to:
 - (a) Examine, based on risk analysis, against a detailed list, the contents of relief consignments, and certify the results of this examination on that list; and
 - (b) Where possible place such consignments under Customs seals where such action is likely to avoid delays in the forwarding of the goods at later stages in their journey;
- ❖ To permit such consignments to be presented for export clearance at any approved Customs office in advance of the need for actual export.

Transit

It is recommended:

- ❖ To facilitate as far as possible the carriage of relief consignments in Customs transit, with due regard to any action taken at earlier stages in their journey.

Import

It is recommended:

- ❖ To allow admission free of import duties and taxes, or charges having an equivalent effect, and free of economic import prohibitions or restrictions in respect of all relief consignments imported by organizations approved by the competent authorities, for distribution free of charge by such organizations or under their control to the victims of a disaster in their territory, in particular where such consignments consist of foodstuffs, medicaments, clothing, blankets, tents, prefabricated houses, or other goods of prime necessity;
- ❖ To facilitate the temporary admission, with conditional relief from import duties and taxes, of any equipment required by the organizations involved in disaster relief and used by them or under their control in action undertaken to alleviate the effects of a disaster; and wherever possible not require security but be content with an undertaking given by the approved organization to re-export such equipment;
- ❖ To lodge and register or check the Goods declaration and supporting documents prior to the arrival of the goods, and their release upon arrival.

Sources

- *WCO Revised Kyoto Convention, Specific Annex J.5*
- *WCO Istanbul Convention, Annex B.9*
- *Recommendation of the Customs Co-operation Council to expedite the forwarding of relief consignments in the event of disaster (8 June 1970)*