

Australia's Humanitarian Action

Why Australia supports humanitarian action

Humanitarian action saves lives. It is fundamental to the purpose of Australia's broader development program—helping people overcome poverty. Natural disasters and conflict disproportionately affect the poor. More than 95 per cent of people killed by natural disasters are from developing countries.

In 2010, 385 natural disasters killed more than 297 000 people worldwide, while conflict and persecution left some 43.7 million people displaced at the end of 2010, the highest number in more than 15 years. Over the last three decades, the Asia-Pacific region has accounted for 85 per cent of the world's deaths and 38 per cent of economic losses due to natural disasters.

Humanitarian action can mean the difference between life and death for many thousands of people each year. It helps people prepare for, respond to and recover from crisis, so that they can get back to leading productive lives more quickly. Humanitarian action helps to protect and rebuild hard-won development gains by providing access to life-saving help such as food assistance, education and health services.

The need for humanitarian action is growing. Natural disasters are increasing in frequency, scale and impact. Conflict may also intensify in the coming decades as the world's population continues to rise and the demand for limited natural resources continues to grow.

Australians want to help

It is a core Australian value to help those who find themselves in trouble. We have a long tradition of extending our support to people affected by humanitarian crises overseas—through government and private contributions. Australians privately contribute \$100 million annually to people affected by crises in developing countries.

How Australia supports humanitarian action

The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) is responsible for leading and coordinating the Australian Government's response to humanitarian crises in developing countries. AusAID works with a range of partners including other Australian government agencies, state and territory departments, the United Nations, International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and non-government organisations to deliver humanitarian action.

Australia responds to rapid-onset crises (such as volcanic eruption), slow-onset crises (such as drought) and protracted crises (such as internal conflict). We respond as quickly as possible to rapid-onset crises, provide funding early in response to slow-

onset crises to mitigate the worst impact of the disaster, and provide multi-year funding to support those affected by protracted crises.

In Pakistan, Australia was part of the global emergency response to the 2010 floods—a disaster which affected 20 million people. We provided food, shelter, water and sanitation, and hygiene kits. The Australian Government sent a 180-strong civilian and military medical team, treating more than 11,000 patients in a temporary health centre. Our support for early recovery activities helped farmers replant crops, assisted children return to school and provided access to health services.

Saving lives

Australia's humanitarian action saves lives, alleviates suffering and enhances human dignity during and in the aftermath of crises. We also work to strengthen preparedness for the occurrence of such situations.

Australia supports humanitarian action that is appropriate and effective. We define this as action that:

- meets the needs of and is accountable to affected populations
- supports partner governments and communities in affected countries, including with disaster preparedness
- protects the safety, dignity and rights of affected populations
- is timely and coordinated
- integrates recovery as part of humanitarian action to support longer-term development.

Delivering results

Australia commits to:

- respond within 48 hours to a request for assistance from a developing country experiencing a major humanitarian crisis
- respond effectively to simultaneous disasters
- provide life-saving assistance to more than 25 million people in crisis situations in the period 2012–2016, through effective disaster risk reduction, land mine clearance, conflict prevention and humanitarian action.

Australia helps developing countries to prepare for, respond to and recover from humanitarian crises by:

- **Working with and contributing funds to experienced partners.** The majority of Australian Government humanitarian funding is channelled through partners including United Nations agencies, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and non-government organisations. These partners are selected for their long-term relationships with communities affected by crises and their ability to deliver professional and effective responses in line

with Australia's *Humanitarian Action Policy*. AusAID has multi-year partnerships and processes in place to ensure funding is disbursed quickly and responsibly in an emergency.

In Afghanistan, Australia has supported the provision of humanitarian assistance such as emergency food supplies, safe water, temporary shelter and access to improved health services. We have also helped communities to establish long-term livelihood security, including by providing training, seeds and equipment to farmers.

- **Deploying experts and specialist teams.** Australia makes sure the right relief workers are deployed in a crisis. Many Australians have valuable specialist expertise to contribute, in fields such as emergency health, logistics, the rights and safety of affected populations and search and rescue. Our stand-by arrangements enable us to deploy our experts where they are most needed.

One example is the Australian Civilian Corps—a register of trained specialists that Australia deploys to countries affected by natural disaster or conflict. The civilian corps supports recovery, stabilisation and development planning, acting as a bridge between humanitarian action and long-term development programs.

- **Providing appropriate and cost-effective relief supplies.** Australia has stores of relief items such as hygiene kits, tarpaulins and water containers. Where an emergency response requires items that we do not have in store, we fast-track procurement so the right type of relief is provided quickly. Australia maintains an agreement with a logistics company to provide logistic, procurement, shipping and personnel services. The Australian Defence Force can also provide logistical support during major crises.

In Samoa, following the 2009 earthquake and tsunami, Australia provided health personnel, search and rescue teams and logisticians to treat the injured and search for survivors. We also support improved disaster monitoring and warning systems and a trained Samoan volunteer emergency response team.

Supporting improved international humanitarian action

Australia's practical approach and strong partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region and with humanitarian agencies around the world, mean we are well-placed to play a constructive role in international humanitarian action. Australia focuses on:

- continuous improvement, including efforts to improve international humanitarian leadership and coordination

Australia is committed to improved humanitarian leadership, coordination, financing mechanisms and partnerships. We support action that responds to partner governments' priorities and encourages community ownership.

- the protection of affected populations

Australia will continue to be a strong advocate for protection internationally and ensure protection is integrated in our humanitarian action.

- accountable and inclusive humanitarian action

Australia is an advocate for involving affected people in humanitarian action, and supports equal access to assistance for women, girls, boys and men.

- increased involvement of all nations in international humanitarian dialogue and a greater focus on the role of regional organisations

Australia will encourage more nations to engage in international discussion on humanitarian issues in order to strengthen partnerships for effective, well-coordinated international humanitarian action.

- strengthened understanding between humanitarian actors, the military and police in emergency response

Australia will support initiatives that strengthens this understanding, both in Australia and overseas.

More information about AusAID and Australia's *Humanitarian Action Policy* is available at <http://www.aisaid.gov.au/>

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