



DIREZIONE GENERALE OPERE DON BOSCO
Via della Pisana 1111 – 00163 Roma

Il Rettor Maggiore

Prot. 14/0020
Rome, 31 January 2014

The Service of the Salesians In Times of Emergency

To all Provincial and Delegation Superiors

Drawing on the experience of the past 10 years at times of global emergencies faced by Salesian provinces, the Salesian Family or other Catholic Church Congregations and international agencies as a result of natural disasters, war or violence, I wish to propose some guidelines in this letter to be followed in places where our Congregation is present. I am confident that these indications could help us to practise Gospel solidarity and serve our neighbors in need more effectively.

Based on our recent experience there are different categories of emergency that we face around the world. Some are only on a local or minor scale (1), some do not directly affect our presences (2), some are ongoing and long-lasting emergencies (3). With these guidelines I would especially like to address larger scale emergencies requiring major international solidarity or intervention and which occur in countries or zones where the Salesians are present.

Table: Emergency typology (needing coordination at central level)

<i>Different categories of emergency</i>	<i>Local or Minor Emergency</i>	<i>International or Major Emergency</i>	<i>Ongoing Emergency (violence, war...)</i>
<i>Immediate and direct impact on SDBs (or Salesian Family)</i>	<i>No coordinating activity undertaken</i>	<i>Coordinated activity undertaken according to guidelines in this letter (point 5)</i>	<i>Coordinating activity is undertaken according to guidelines in this letter (point 5)</i>
<i>No direct impact on SDBs (or Salesian Family) but we are close to disaster site</i>	<i>No coordinating activity undertaken</i>	<i>Following collection of information, decision is taken by the Rector Major</i>	<i>Following collection of information, decision is taken by the Rector Major</i>
<i>SDBs NOT present in the country (or nearby geographical zone)</i>	<i>No coordinating activity undertaken</i>	<i>No coordinating activity undertaken</i>	<i>No coordinating activity undertaken</i>

As disciple missionaries of Jesus and sons of Don Bosco we consider it important to:



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1. Be there

The first and most important guideline for response in emergencies rests with the Salesian communities and institutions present in a location, zone or country exposed to the emergency. Past experience shows that, in responding to disasters, most lives are saved by the local population within the first days following the catastrophe. In our recent history, there have been numerous examples of individual Salesians, institutions and provinces who have responded to the needs of people whose lives have been shattered by a natural disaster or consequences of war. Local Salesians with their Educative and Pastoral Community members (EPC) have opened schools and institutions to provide shelter; Salesians in formation have reached out to serve people in the immediate aftermath of a tsunami, earthquake, typhoon or ethnic violence. This quick, compassionate and generous response has, in many instances, made a real difference. In the midst of a disaster, no matter how limited our resources are, our first and most important response must take place at the local level.

2. Provide spiritual and effective service

Our care for emergency victims must be both practical and spiritual. Providing financial help and material support is important, but not enough. Our presence must provide the consolation, healing power and hope of the Gospel. It must be effective, but it must also give witness to our being disciples of the compassionate Lord, even and perhaps even more so in multi-religious and multi-cultural contexts, where we must be in dialogue with and respectful of the faith of others. We also need to provide trauma counseling, since the psychological misery of losing dear ones and home is sometimes more dramatic than material loss. Teams must be set up and trained for such services, particularly in those provinces where emergencies are likely to occur on a regular basis – as may be the case for tsunami, storm or drought-prone areas.

3. Work together

Quick emergency response times usually call for the coordinated efforts of many people. Fortunately, disasters often call forth much generosity and even heroism among many sectors and persons. In a special way we work with young people, whose idealism, energy and generosity are often called forth in a special way during time of calamity. We should be ready to humbly and generously cooperate with others in our immediate surroundings: the local Church, local Caritas organizations, Salesian Family members, other religious groups, NGOs, as well as men and women of good will from other faiths. Collaboration also extends to the wider Salesian Congregation: to other Provinces, Provincial Conferences and other Salesians organizations involved in this field (Mission Offices, Don Bosco Network, PDO and other NGOs). If we avoid competition with others in helping the victims, we prepare for needs that are not yet met!



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4. Share information

When a disaster occurs in one place, friendship and fraternal concern means that Salesians, our Lay Mission Partners and members of the Salesian Family in other places want to know how their brothers in the stricken area are and how they can help. In cases of major emergencies the Provincial of the affected area should communicate directly with the Rector Major and his Council, sending up-to-date reports that may include requests for assistance, where needed. In order to raise funds and coordinate efforts, speedy, accurate and clear information is crucial for all involved. The province can also ask Salesian agencies (PDOs, Mission Office, NGOs or Don Bosco Network) for communications assistance.

5. Welcome international solidarity and coordination

While recognizing the importance of local action we must not neglect the universal solidarity of the whole Congregation: we should request prayers, raise awareness in the media and social networks, look for financial help, send likely volunteers or experts from other countries or provinces.

Our emergency experience shows the crucial importance of a reliable coordinator on the spot (SDB, PDO staff or other suitable person) as well as clear coordination between the respective external Salesian and non-Salesian agencies who are not in the emergency area. The Don Bosco Network and Major Mission Offices are especially valuable for their teamwork potential, with their abundant and long experience. In the case of a global emergency the *'Procedures for emergency response coordination for DBN Members in first 48 hours after the emergency occurs'* (Don Bosco Network 2014) are helpful. The Rector Major takes the decision if the emergency falls into the 'international or major emergency' category to be coordinated at the Congregational level (cf. highlighted typologies above).

6. Be transparent

Transparency and accountability are international professional standards which need to be met in any project relating to these emergency situations. The province which is recipient of assistance takes on this responsibility and is mindful of the respect due to donors' intentions and the need for exact reporting throughout the entire process.



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7. Think long term

Much support is often needed long after the *immediate emergency* phase, in the *second phase of early recovery* or the *third phase of rehabilitation or reconstruction*, after other agencies have left the disaster area or after international media has lost interest and turned to other issues. Also in long-lasting violent situations (wars, communal unrest) where large number of refugees are displaced, awareness and advocacy campaigns are very important.

8. Foster local participation and rights-based awareness

In the second and third phases we must move towards local participation, i.e. the involvement of local people in their own sustainable development, justice and rights-based approaches to education, and advocacy for their rights by governments, peace movements (in places of continuous conflict). Mission Offices and funding agencies should begin to fund more people's participation and education programs with long-lasting impact. In areas of frequent emergencies, disaster response groups (Emergency units) must be set up and educated.

9. Take preventive measures for emergencies

Provinces located in particular disaster-prone areas (typhoon, tsunami, earthquake or ethnic - war violence) should be ready with appropriate tools (*Emergency Response Groups*) and procedures (*Emergency Situations Procedures*): Planning Development Offices (PDO) or other similar provincial teams in line with Don Bosco's Preventive system. Some of our agencies should dedicate themselves to studying long-term measures for reducing risks, or setting up training programs to change behaviours and limit the impact of disasters on people, or helping prepare and advocate sounder, more sustainable policies. These preventive initiatives are an integral and important part of our service. Ecological education in our curricula also helps to prevent a number of natural disasters such as the destruction wrought by flood, famine or tsunami. These Provinces are advised to create Emergency Response Groups and respective funding during non-emergency times. Local governments often announce relief packages for those affected which do not reach them due to bureaucratic corruption and the inability of the poor to access them. We should set up teams to legally obtain for those affected whatever is their right.



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10. Guarantee a reasonable transition from the emergency phase to the reconstruction phase

Avoid using emergency funds for putting up permanent structures, or go slow and build them only after due study and survey of the real needs, usefulness and sustainability of such structures. (Experience shows that such hurried building of “emergency response institutions” in the name of education, employment, job-training for youth from these areas, does not function. It is only after some time has passed that we are able to assess the real needs of the people and the young and those services that the Salesians can or cannot provide.)

I invite all Salesian provinces and communities to reflect on these guidelines, with a view to action and implementation. I pray that the Salesians who face the many dramatic instances of suffering in our world today, may continue to humbly and generously offer our compassion, solidarity and service.

Yours sincerely in Don Bosco

Pascual Chávez V.

Fr. Pascual Chávez V., SDB

Rector Major

