

Press Release
Rome – June 12, 2008

IDLO TO PUBLISH NEW GUIDEBOOK ON LEGAL PRINCIPLES RELATING TO NATURAL DISASTERS

The cyclone and earthquake which recently hit regions of Burma and China were the latest in a series of natural disasters highlighting the importance of timely, coordinated and needs-responsive humanitarian assistance.

In the aftermath of a natural disaster, the primary focus is on managing critical areas of relief such as evacuation, and the provision of food, shelter and medical supplies. Often overlooked however, is the vital role of the legal system in supporting emergency intervention and longer-term recovery efforts.

Dr Erica Harper, editor and co-author of a new IDLO guidebook on rule of law priorities following natural disasters says:

“Aid agencies and development organizations at both national and international levels need to be fully aware of the legal context of their work. Ignoring or operating outside a state’s legal or regulatory systems risks delaying the delivery of urgent aid and reconstruction support, undermining the rights of beneficiaries, and jeopardizing the continuity and sustainability of assistance programs.”

“Many agencies involved in post-disaster rehabilitation are not accustomed to resolving legal issues and are unlikely to have lawyers on staff. Identifying and understanding the applicable law in a country can therefore prove to be a significant obstacle, particularly for international organizations under pressure to deliver fast results, while operating in an unfamiliar context.”

A major concern in post-disaster situations is securing the protection of vulnerable groups. This can require specialist knowledge on prevention of the illegal adoption of orphans; trafficking of minors or women; violence against marginalized groups; and discrimination in the distribution of humanitarian aid.

In turn, those responsible for community and infrastructure reconstruction need to take account of planning and development laws, environmental laws and regulatory frameworks for managing land ownership. In some countries, the legislative or regulatory framework may be outdated, incomplete, or exist in competition with non-state (customary) systems. Where a natural disaster strikes an area affected by civil conflict, basic legal machinery such as courts may not be operating effectively.

IDLO’s new guidebook, which is due to be published next month, provides practical information and advice for humanitarian agencies and state authorities in tackling urgent legal issues relating to post-natural disaster rehabilitation, including:

- the protection of the rights of vulnerable groups
- land and property management
- anti-corruption/funds management

Continues...

In addition to drawing on its extensive experience of development law programs in post-tsunami Indonesia and Sri Lanka, IDLO compiled the guidebook with supporting contributions from experts at Displacement Solutions, UNICEF, UNHABITAT, Plan International, HelpAge International, Handicap International, the Norwegian Refugee Council and the Basel Institute on Governance.

IDLO's Post-Tsunami Legal Assistance Projects in Indonesia and Sri Lanka ran from 2005 to 2007, and were designed to support the thousands of people struggling to overcome legal obstacles in rebuilding their lives, especially with regard to land, inheritance distribution, economic opportunity, and guardianship issues.

(ENDS)

NOTES

For advanced copies of the guidebook, please contact:

Sophie Turner, Press Officer, IDLO Headquarters in Rome, Italy
Tel: (+39) 06 40403224, email: sturner@idlo.int

IDLO (International Development Law Organization) is an international, inter-governmental organization with a mandate to promote the Rule of Law and good governance in developing countries, countries in economic transition and countries emerging from post-conflict situations. Since its establishment in 1983, IDLO has worked with more than 17,000 lawyers, magistrates and officials from approximately 176 countries.

IDLO has its Headquarters in Rome, Italy and two Regional Offices; in Cairo, Egypt, covering Arabic-speaking countries and in Sydney, Australia, covering the Asia Pacific area. IDLO currently operates Project Offices in Afghanistan, Indonesia and Kyrgyzstan.

IDLO is funded by contributions from its 18 Member States and other donors.

For detailed information on IDLO and its activities, please refer to our website at www.idlo.int.