



**Message from Mr. Nawaf AL-SLEIBI,
Secretary-General of the International Civil Defence Organisation
on the occasion of the 2013 World Civil Defence Day**

March 1, 2013

“Civil protection and preparation of civil societies for disaster risk prevention”

The International Civil Defence Organisation celebrates every year on the 1st March the World Civil Defence Day, which commemorates the entry into force of its Constitution as an intergovernmental Organisation .

Pursuant to the Executive Board Resolution approved in its 44th Session (Geneva, 2011), the ICDO decided that this year’s celebration would come under the motto “Civil protection and civic organisations’ preparedness for disaster risk reduction”, in acknowledgement by the ICDO of the important and central role played by civil society organisations in disasters and crises, as well as community preparedness to respond to them.

In recent years, the world has witnessed many different and complex disasters ranging from natural and manmade disasters to humanitarian crises and civil wars that claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands and displaced millions, in addition to their damage on State economies. Today, we observe that some areas even lack the minimum requirements for decent living.

This drives me to say that civil protection services did not step away, they have rather carried out their duties in the best way, despite the difficulties encountered including the lack of resources, expertise, advance planning and good preparedness.

From this perspective, the International Civil Defence Organisation has developed a programme based on two main axes:

Axis I: Training and preparation of cadres at various levels

Axis II: Follow-up on the development of national civil protection services, which is among the key missions defined in the ICDO Constitution.

Studies and field experiences indicate that civil defence and emergency services, regardless the amount of strength, resources and diligent planning that are made available to them within the framework of their missions, cannot by themselves alone ensure the protection of a nation, its properties and the environment.

Since we live in an era of globalization characterized by great technological developments and communication between communities across the world, it became necessary to involve civil



society organisations in the preparation of disaster risk reduction and readiness for all types of emergency.

From time immemorial, people voluntarily supported each other, whether such support was inherited through tradition or within the framework of individual and collective activities locally driven and limited in scope.

We note that today, a large diversity of charity and humanitarian organisations have developed in all areas, being the result of special convictions, specific goals, or sometimes the outcome of experience and expertise transferred from other countries.

These associations imposed themselves by providing assistance, mostly limited, during disasters. In other cases, they caused some problems in organizing and determining their missions in the scope of local laws and regulations within the disaster-stricken states.

We must stand and show appreciation and respect for civil society organisations. In fact, during the last two years, these organisations did not hesitate to provide substantial services to areas hit by disasters and major incidents across the world, taking care of hundreds of thousands of victims and refugees. They still support government agencies to alleviate the suffering of these refugees, especially those forced by incidents to leave everything behind and resort to safe zones in neighbouring countries. These organisations stand united through their various denominations, nationalities and regulations.

I would also like to reiterate my thanks to these civil society associations and organisations for what they offer to countries like Somalia and its refugees in Kenya, to Malian refugees, to Syrian refugees, either in Jordan or in neighbouring countries, and to refugees of various nationalities in Tunisia, Asia and so on.

These organisations and agencies specialized in responding to and managing disaster situations and crises, through their participation and involvement in a timely manner, proved to be highly efficient and professional. The assistance and support provided in the past or still being provided to refugees, injured and disaster-stricken people helped them live the greatest emotional experience and contributed to alleviate their families' as well as their own suffering in such countries or the neighbouring ones.

We must take advantage of their vitality and pledge our responsibility towards such organisations within the legal framework, by providing them with qualifications that will allow them to work as a support to civil protection, civil defence and emergency services by raising awareness of citizens and getting them prepared. Humanitarian organisations must be seen as mediators between citizens and State agencies during disaster situations and we shall work with them based on their field of expertise and orientation. This can only be achieved through training and forming these organisations according to their fields of expertise and within the context of a national network, provided that they abide by laws, regulations and strategies of civil protection and civil defence organisations so as to prevent them from serving purposes other than those hoped and wished



for. Because of their complex structure as well as their internal rules and regulations, it is challenging for humanitarian organisations to unify their activities if they fail to show a strong desire to do so.

It is also unacceptable that these organisations work with civil defence organisations for purposes other than those required or desired. Their exposure as well as the evaluation of their activities within the context of disaster risk reduction reinforces the idea that we shall support them in the field. They shall work within a structured framework inside each State, under its laws. Mention must here be made of the Tunis Declaration proclaimed in the wake of the International Conference on Volunteering (1999), which identified ways to involve civil society in disaster response, in addition to the Geneva Declaration that followed the Ministerial Conference (2000) and also called for forming and preparing civil society to respond to disaster situations, as well as involving it in preventive programmes and strategies.

I invite all civil defence and civil protection organisations as well as emergency services to benefit from these driving forces by engaging them in recruiting volunteers and framing civil society, particularly within the current stifling global economic crisis, which led to reduced international cooperation, not only in disaster response, but also in restoring life to normal in disaster-stricken areas. Because disasters have a direct impact on the State's economy, development and citizens' ordinary life, we are currently working closely with UN and international organisations, as well as the global network of charitable and civil society organisations and associations, to create an effective framework and identify clear objectives for these organisations and associations. This will allow them to properly accomplish their duties instead of becoming an impediment whether by being reduced to a bystander, providing unrealistic opinions, or working for other purposes. Hence, the media in all its forms is called upon more than ever to play a full role in helping civil protection and civil defence organisations as well as emergency services, to prepare civil societies, and highlight the field facts about what these organisations are doing and the heavy price they are paying. In fact, we most regrettably lost a number of our colleagues, martyrs of duty, in addition to others injured and wounded, to whom we wish a speedy recovery. We do not forget victims of duty from organisations and associations that have lost numbers of their members and employees and saw others injured while responding to disasters in many parts of the world.

This year, as we celebrate this large headline, because of its importance and meanings, we hope that such initiative will start on the right track by recruiting volunteers and raising awareness of civil societies through a long-term sustained programme, so that we can benefit from this human potential and prevent it from vanishing like smoke at the end of the celebration. Civic organisations are like a train carrying passengers of different social strata, including the rich and the poor, the educated and the illiterate, the worker and the non-worker, the farmer and the industrial worker, the elderly and the young. This combination, provided that we listen to it carefully and provide it with a proper environment, will be easy to unite for the sake of a common goal, consisting of building a safe community, ready to respond to any kind of emergency, a community of solidarity as found in some countries, the names of which I prefer not to mention, because differences in habits, tradition and religion between countries call upon every State to build a civil society solidarity network according to its own distinctive characteristics.

ORGANISATION INTERNATIONALE
DE PROTECTION CIVILE **OIPC**

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INTERNATIONAL CIVIL DEFENCE
ORGANIZATION **ICDO**

МЕЖДУНАРОДНАЯ ОРГАНИЗАЦИЯ
ГРАЖДАНСКОЙ ОБОРОНЫ **МОГО**

المنظمة الدولية للحماية المدنية
والدفاع المدني

The Global network of civil society organisations represents a platform that would highlight the capabilities and competencies of such organisations. However, we do not wish this network to be of seasonal work, but rather of durable and perpetual reach in the view of building safer homes and communities.

Securing our future is based on solidarity, mobilization, volunteer recruitment and community preparedness.

So let's work on solidarity as well as community preparedness and secure a better future.

Geneva, 15.02.2013

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