



BASIC ELEMENTS OF CIVIL DEFENCE

1. Civil Defence ensures Protection and Assistance

“Protection” means all prevention activities, and in particular information and training, forecasting and preparation, related to sheltering people and property from disasters and accidents of all nature.

“Assistance” covers all measures intended to reduce the consequences of disasters, namely rescue actions and rehabilitation operations during and after disasters.

This principle is the very grounds for the existence of all national civil defence structures. It does not for all that signify that all these activities must be the exclusive responsibility of these services.

Given the various actors concerned directly or indirectly by questions relating to civil defence, rationalising the management of civil defence services may lead the national competent authorities to define or redefine their mission. One can thus imagine a distinction between those activities which are the exclusive responsibility of civil defence services (prevention, protection and fire fighting...) and those in which they work with the other services and professionals concerned (prevention of and protection from accidents and disasters).

Concretely, the term “other services and professionals concerned” covers State and area community services, public enterprises, professionals whose activities fall within the private sector (doctors, helpers...) and associations (Red Cross...).

However, although these civil defence activities may be divided between several actors, efficient and rational assistance ensuring protection and assistance to all can only be achieved through centralised management, at the national and regional civil defence centralised management, at the national and regional civil defence services levels, of personnel resources and of the supplies and equipment allocated to the defined assignments.

2. Civil Defence is a public service

Ensuring protection and assistance to the population is a public authority prerogative which belongs in fact to the State. This power must be bestowed impartially over the entire territory. Thus, civil defence is a national public service which functions not in a spontaneous manner but on the basis of a law issuing from constitutional instruments, and established principles or laws.

Generally, the safety of persons, more particularly from disasters of all kinds, falls in the realm of the hard core public service activities which the State is naturally bound to ensure.

The immediate consequence is that such public service is characterised by management rules which differ from those applied by private enterprises. Thus the existence of the public service is justified by the legitimacy of the public need and requires it to provide its services regularly and without interruption.

Similarly, every person must be equal with respect to public service and no person may benefit from a special advantage or suffer from unjustified discrimination. The principle of neutrality (as regards political opinion, trade union affiliation, religious beliefs...) is the corollary of this principle of equality.

Finally, civil defence defined as a public service implies that the services provided always be adapted to the needs of the population. Civil defence is bound to function not in its own interest but for the benefit of the persons and property which it is its mission to protect.

3. Civil Defence is an instrument of multi-sectorial coordination

National civil defence services are the ideal organisms for conducting the diverse operations for the safeguard of persons, property and the environment before, during and after disasters.

During the phase of preparation for disasters and in the implementation of prevention measures, civil defence must assume this role of senior management at a time when demographic, social technical and other parameters must be integrated.

In the same way, in the course of emergency situations, it is up to national civil defence organs to manage and coordinate the actions of the various civil and military intervention units involved in rescue operations.

Multiform and multifunctional, national civil defence structures are for States a favoured management tool meant to deal with risks and disasters of all kind under the best possible conditions.

To consider civil defence as an instrument of multi-sector coordination inevitably leads to the improvement of personnel and property management and therefore strengthens the efficiency of civil defence services. At the national level, this requires the establishment of an inter-ministerial structure attached to the Prime Minister or the Presidency, if only to allow an overall view of the questions related to civil defence.

Its first mission is to establish and promote a national civil defence policy and to provide the necessary support to the decentralised civil defence services.

At the local level, the regional civil defence services must, in principle, be responsible in this field for the whole regional area (department, province ...) in order to organise the safeguard of people, property and the environment. To do this, they must first and foremost prepare a risk analysis and coverage plan. This plan must satisfy two basic requirements: furnish elements of analysis allowing the adequacy of rescue means to be evaluated in relation to the reality of risks and allow the decision-makers (prefects, governors) to make choices when purchasing equipment and allocating it to the national rescue centres in a rational way.

Such a document constitutes a forecast and planning tool and must lead the regional civil defence service to develop:

- information documents, which can be consulted by the population, detailing the nature of risks existing within a given geographic area and the safety instructions to be followed to face them.

- rescue plans registering public and private means likely to be brought into action and organising the command structure.

The need for planning is evident, whether for emergency plans facing clearly identified particular risks, or for pre-established organisation charts which can be adapted to any disaster situation (such as the "Plan ORSEC").

4. The emblem of Civil Defence is a blue equilateral triangle on an orange background

The distinctive inter-national sign of civil defence is a blue equilateral triangle on an orange background.

Persons wearing this sign have the duty to provide, in all circumstances, protection and assistance to populations in the face of disasters and armed conflicts and to promote a culture of disaster prevention within the population. Civil defence, its personnel, its equipment and the persons and property placed under its protection must be respected.

See the provisions of Additional Protocol 1 to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949.