

**Message of the Secretary-General  
of the International Civil Defence Organization  
on the occasion of the World Civil Defence Day**

**1st March 2002**

*Basic elements of Civil Defence*

It will soon be forty years since the United Nations General Assembly invited all Member States to "consider the possibility of establishing an appropriate national planning and action mechanism, best adapted to their particular situation, with a view to defining the scope and nature of the assistance necessary and centralising the management of rescue operations".

It is also thirty years since the same international body invited governments to "establish forecast plans of critical situations...; constitute stocks of supplies for emergency situations...; take the necessary measures to train personnel for emergency operations...; improve their national alert system".

These suggestions were acted upon and most States have to-day an ad hoc structure responsible for reacting as efficiently as possible to the needs of the population as regards the safeguard of people and property in the face of disasters and accidents of all nature.

However, in view of the characteristics and situations specific to each country, these structures do not follow any typical organisational pattern. The study undertaken in this field by the International Civil Defence Organisation (ICDO) on the occasion of the 12th International Conference on Civil Defence, clearly confirms this, if only when referring to the different terms used in this respect: civil protection, civil defence, civil safety, emergency situations management and others.

Conscious of this lack of homogeneity, International Humanitarian Law, has therefore decided to base its definition of civil defence on functional rather than structural criteria. Thus, the Additional Protocol of 8 June 1977 establishes a list of humanitarian tasks aimed at protecting the civilian population from the danger of hostilities or disasters, helping it to overcome their immediate effects and ensuring the conditions necessary for its survival.

In other words, despite their different structures, all the national civil protection, civil defence, civil safety, and emergency situations management services find their unity through the functions exercised, namely protection of and assistance to populations, property and the environment.

It is therefore important to seek and establish a certain number of values common to all these ad hoc structures, and the ICDO whose mission is to federate national civil protection, civil defence, civil safety and emergency situations management services is the international organisation most appropriate to fulfil this mission.

Indeed only the setting up and promotion of a basic set of rules and principles relating to civil protection can lead to the unity of the civil protection movement and overcome the obstacles likely to delay or limit the necessary solidarity and cooperation between its members.

This is why, on the occasion of Civil Protection World Day, on 1 March 2002, the ICDO invites all national civil protection services to recognise and promote the basic elements of civil defence.