

## DISASTER RELIEF IN THE NETHERLANDS

As a consequence of its geographic location, the high population density and the highly industrialized character of society, the Netherlands is increasingly vulnerable to the effects of natural and industrial disasters and other calamities. Within the context of achieving an integral safety policy, this vulnerability has caused, amongst others, that much attention has been - and will be - paid to disaster relief and crisis management and especially to preparedness measures.

The policy of the Ministry of the Interior comprises, amongst others, the care for maintaining public order and safety. This includes in fact three components: public order, that is to say together with the Ministry of Justice the general responsibility for the police; public safety, the general responsibility for fire fighting and disaster relief and finally the responsibility for the co-ordination and information function to the relevant administrative levels. Within the Dutch view, the provision of safety in its widest context can be seen as a number of links forming together the so-called 'safety chain'. These links are pro-action, prevention, preparedness, repression and aftercare. Integral safety therefore means attention from the administrative levels and from relief organisations to each link of the safety chain. Police, fire services and disaster relief organisations such as ambulance and basic health services are all increasingly involved in the implementation of disaster relief and crisis management policies which are still in a stage of development.

It is important that the public authorities are well prepared for the different types of calamities which may disrupt society. Within the context of recently reviewed policies for crisis management, relevant measures are currently developed in close co-operation with other departments. Crisis management should be understood as the entire set of measures taken and provisions made by the public authorities in co-operation with other organisations, with a view to acute emergency situations, in order to guarantee safety in a broad sense. Safety in this connection comprises national and international legal order, public safety and economic safety. The policy with respect to crisis management continues to build on the starting points for disaster relief on the one hand, and on the other hand it covers a broad range of other disruptions of society.

For the implementation of concrete measures in response to an (imminent) crisis, including amongst others disasters, the so-called 'scaling up' principle has been adopted. The basis is formed by the operational services which also assist in ordinary accidents and calamities. In the Netherlands the municipal authorities have the prime responsibility for disaster relief. The provincial and national authorities also have their own responsibilities. The 'scaling-up' principle has an administrative and an operational component. That is to say that in case of a crisis with a larger territorial effect or magnitude a higher administrative level will be in charge. The same applies to the use of operational relief organisations, both in terms of the type of assistance as well as in terms of the size of the assistance. Information to the public is an important aspect that will be carried out by the local authorities. However, for the

development of information materials and national information campaigns the national authorities have created the necessary conditions. Generally speaking, a great deal of attention has been paid to informing the public about various aspects of (potential) disasters and their relief measures, especially from a preventive and repressive point of view. In this context the Ministry of the Interior is in the process of fully modernizing the national early warning system for the population.

Some of the larger and international disasters require control and co-ordination at national administrative level. Each department has its own responsibility for crisis management in its policy area. For example, the Ministry of Transport and Public Works is in charge of taking measures for the prevention and control of dike breaches and flooding; the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and Environment takes care of the protection of the environment; and the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Cultural Affairs has the specific responsibility for health issues, among which epidemics. The ability to make rapid and careful decisions is crucial in crisis situations. For this reason, agreements regarding an effective decision-making structure in times of crisis are already made in advance in the Netherlands.

Depending on the nature of the crisis and/or disaster, it has to be established which department has the leading role and whether or not there will be a departmental co-ordination centre in operation. With serious (international) crises a policy team will be formed comprising the most highly involved national government officials or their immediate representatives. In such cases, there will be a National Co-ordination

Centre (NCC). In almost every crisis situation, however, the Ministry of the Interior plays an important role because of its general co-ordinating responsibility for crisis management and disaster control. For this purpose, a permanently operational National Co-ordination Centre (LCC in Dutch) has been established within the Ministry of the Interior. The LCC handles the dissemination of information and the co-ordination between the various ministries and with the municipal authorities. As far as information to the public is concerned, this will be taken care of by a National Information Centre, also established within the Ministry of the Interior. The LCC is also basically the contact point for international requests for assistance. International requests for assistance during disasters or large calamities must initially be presented to the LCC. Subsequently, the question as to what extent and in what manner such international requests for assistance can be satisfied are examined by the LCC. The implementation of the actions to be taken can then be arranged in consultation with the national and international entities involved.

As far as the Netherlands is concerned, requests for material or personnel support submitted by international organisations such as the UN (DHA, UNCUEA and ECE), the European Union or NATO first have to be registered with the LCC. In view of the fact that virtually no emergency aid or other supplies are kept in stock and that the technical know-how available in various entities is spread across the entire country, it is not wise to provide the earlier-mentioned international organisations with contact addresses and telephone numbers. The Dutch policy is focused on making a case-by-case evaluation of the requests for assistance submitted to the LCC by international organisations - an evaluation based on availability

and deployment possibilities.

In this context, it must also be pointed out that the Netherlands - to avoid confusion, duplication and competition - is an advocate of better co-ordination and fine-tuning between the various international organisations when it comes to activities in the area of disaster control and (emergency) relief provisions. (Moreover, reserved and critical reactions are called for regarding still more international relief organisations operating in this area, in view of the dubious added value involved).