

**Message from Mr Nawaf Al-Sleibi
Secretary General of the International Civil Defence Organisation (ICDO)
on the occasion of
World Civil Defence Day**

1 March 2008

«Civil Defence and the basic first aid techniques »

“If only I had known what to do!” Who amongst us has not witnessed an accident at home, on the road, or at the workplace, and not felt bitter about not knowing what action needed to be taken? When a serious accident occurs, the first few minutes after the event are critical. Knowing the appropriate action to undertake can mean that one or several lives are saved whilst waiting for the emergency services to arrive.

Today, in the majority of countries, numerous operational and voluntary lifesavers assist the emergency services and, in particular, the civil protection forces, through State-accredited associations. Notable examples include the Red Cross and Red Crescent national organizations. Added to these are people who for professional reasons are required, or strongly encouraged, to undertake complementary first aid training.

Despite these measures, the number of lifesavers is still largely insufficient. Two or three minutes are all it takes to die from a hemorrhage or respiratory arrest, even though the time required for the emergency services to arrive on the scene varies between a few minutes and a few dozen minutes, depending on the individual organization of the emergency services in each country. Reducing this time to less than five minutes nationwide would simply be too costly. The only economically viable solution is to increase as much as possible basic first aid training among the general public. It would be better to have a multitude of individuals who know essential basic life-saving techniques than a handful of life-saving specialists.

To do this, the existing complete teachings on life-saving leading to a national diploma qualification are not appropriate as the courses cannot be delivered massively in a matter of hours. However, experience has proven that basic first aid techniques can be learnt rapidly as they are simple enough to be grasped by all.

This is why public authorities should implement all necessary procedures to ensure that basic first aid training is made as widely accessible as possible so that everyone will know what to do when faced with a victim of an emergency situation.

The task is difficult to accomplish as, in the majority of countries, knowledge of first aid is not compulsory for anyone and few people decide voluntarily to learn these skills. However, it is important to point out that certain States are pioneers in the field of first aid and have decided to make basic first aid training a legal requirement; notably it is one of the conditions imposed when applying to obtain a driving license.

It would appear possible to ensure that a maximum number of people receive this basic training and civil defence services are best placed to train the population in essential life-saving techniques.

Surely civil defence agents who undertake daily rescue operations on the ground would be most effective at spreading the message to the population and instilling in them best practice procedures to undertake before the arrival of the emergency services? This would not only benefit the health and wellbeing of the public, but would also simply serve to enhance the image of the Civil Defence organization.

This is why, on the occasion of World Civil Defence Day, 1 March 2008, the ICDO is inviting all States to consider, together with the support of their civil defence services, establishing and implementing an education program on basic first aid techniques to be delivered to the greatest number.

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ICDO Secretary General