

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **CASH DONATIONS**

#### **1. Why do I always hear that cash donations are best?**

From decades of experience through hundreds of disasters we have learned that cash contributions are by far the most effective way for people to channel their good will to those affected by disasters overseas. Disaster situations evolve quickly and cash contributions enable relief agencies to purchase exactly what is needed when it's needed and to respond to new requirements as they arise. Unlike material donations, cash donations entail no transportation and storage costs, no delays, no customs and other fees, and do not divert relief workers' time. In addition, cash donations allow relief supplies to be purchased in markets close to the disaster site, which stimulates local economies by providing employment and generating cash flow. It also ensures that commodities are fresh and familiar to survivors that supplies arrive expeditiously and that goods are culturally, nutritionally and environmentally appropriate. Few material donations have this powerfully beneficial impact.

#### **2. How can I be sure that I can trust these agencies to use my cash to really help disaster victims?**

Donors are encouraged to research different organizations and ask questions. Most organizations have annual reports, financial statements and program updates available on their website and will be happy to answer donor inquiries.

#### **3. What is the appropriate range of overhead that relief agencies should be retaining?**

There is no right range of overhead that relief agencies should be charging. It depends on the nature and the mission of the charitable organizations. Some relief agencies operate with very low overhead rates because of the nature of their work. A logistics organization, for example,

may incur lower overhead costs because they may need fewer people “on the ground” than an organization that sends personnel to the disaster site to administer the distribution of commodities and to manage longer-term relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction programs. It costs money to deliver good services and to keep up good quality work. Charities are not run, solely, by volunteers and they don’t receive services for free. No charity can be effectively run without any cost. Sometimes, charities need to spend more to be effective. It costs money to have a website, to put out annual reports for transparency and accountability purposes, to pay the employees, to organize fundraising activities, to process donations and to protect donors privacy. For more information, you can ask your local charity about their overhead requirements.

**4. Can I receive a tax deduction for my cash donation? How about a report on how my donation to a relief agency was spent?**

Yes, you may receive a tax deduction for all donations made to a registered charity. You may request a donation receipt from the agency to which you make your donation. Additional information on tax exemptions and deductions is available on the Canadian Revenue Agency's website.

You may also receive a report on how your donation to a relief agency was spent. While some organizations may send periodical updates to their donors, you are encouraged to inquire about donation spending with the agency to which the donation was made.

## **IN KIND DONATIONS**

**5. After collecting several items of used clothing, I learned that relief agencies are not able to transport or use my donation. Now what do I do?**

This, unfortunately, is a common frustration. The good news is that you have discovered a truth about unsolicited donations and can now enlighten others about how to give smartly. For your collection, check out our [25 ways to repurpose a material donation](#), which may help you convert your collection into cash to be applied to the relief effort, or to donate the items locally.

**6. I have several vials of prescription and non-prescription medications that I would like to donate to disaster victims. How do I go about donating these medications?**

The coordination and collection of medicines and medical supplies are best left to trained professionals who have expertise in responding to health-related emergencies overseas. The acquisition of appropriate clearances, shelf-life requirements, reliable distribution mechanisms and other factors for transport and use of medications require special knowledge and training. If you have no use for prescription medications in your possession, it is recommended that you dispose of them in a safe and effective manner. For additional information regarding international drug donations, you can contact the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada (DFATD).

## **INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING**

**7. I would like to volunteer a few days of my time as an international disaster relief worker. (E.g. I'm good with children and I can also drive a truck or hand out blankets. I haven't worked overseas but I have traveled quite a bit during my vacations.) I will do anything to help.**

Your desire to help is generous and commendable. The kinds of help that disaster affected populations most need, though, come through amply trained, experienced volunteers. When there is a call for volunteers, candidates with the greatest prospect of being selected have fluency in the language of the disaster-stricken area, prior disaster relief experience, and expertise in technical fields such as medicine, communications, logistics, or water/sanitation engineering. In many cases, these professionals are already available in country and Canadian volunteers are not needed.

When a relief agency accepts a volunteer, that agency is responsible for the volunteer's well being, including food, shelter, health and security. Resources are strained during a disaster, and people without the necessary technical skills and experience can be a financial and logistical

burden to an ongoing relief effort. That, plus the goal of providing optimal service to disaster-affected people, is why most hiring agencies will require at least five years of prior experience, as well as several years of experience working overseas. Requests that volunteers make a commitment to spend at least three months working on a particular disaster are not unusual. Relief work is a profession that demands highly trained and experienced individuals who can work effectively in exceptionally difficult conditions for long periods of time. That is true for volunteers as well.

If you wish to volunteer your time and skills for disaster relief, it is recommended that you volunteer locally by organizing fundraisers or inquiring with the local office of an international relief organization about volunteer needs in their office.

#### **8. How do I get experience in international relief work if no agencies will give me a chance?**

If you are interested in becoming a qualified volunteer it's best to start small and start locally. Volunteering in your own community will give you experience providing effective help to people in need. Your local Red Cross chapter can give you information on disaster management training courses, which are held throughout the year. Your local fire department may also offer training and accept untrained volunteers. Many community colleges offer advanced training in health and other sectors that are relevant to domestic and overseas emergency work. Several organizations also specialize in international relief training and volunteer opportunities:

- **CUSO**

CUSO is an international development charity that sends volunteers abroad. Experienced professionals share their skills with local colleagues in some of the world's poorest communities, working together to find realistic solutions to the problems they face.

- **Alertnet**

AlertNet provides global news, communications and logistics services to the international disaster relief community and the public. Reuters' 150 years' experience reporting from disaster

zones around the world allows AlertNet to give disaster relief organizations fast, reliable information.

- **Reliefweb**

ReliefWeb is a project of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Information and advice about working or volunteering overseas in the developing world.

As you become more experienced, you can begin to ascertain whether domestic or international relief agencies will accept you as a volunteer. Contact agencies that interest you; ask about the qualifications they look for and inquire whether your training makes you eligible to help.

### **9. I am a medical professional and I know that my services must be needed for relief activities. Where do I sign up?**

In most international emergencies doctors are available locally, within the country and within the affected region. In most cases, the host country government will rely upon in-country resources before requesting outside assistance, since local doctors are most familiar with the medical systems, the language, the culture and treatments required.

If you are interested in offering your services as a volunteer, be sure you are working with an agency that is operational on the ground and has authorization from the affected country's government to bring in personnel and medications. When unannounced doctors fly into affected countries they frequently travel no further than the airport or to the capital city. If they're not affiliated with an organization, their medical training may not be recognized, lodging may be unavailable, and roads may be impassible due to the emergency. Local health officials are likely to be fully occupied with relief activities and cannot take time to meet, train and shepherd a visiting physician.

Many medically oriented relief agencies have volunteer personnel that they have worked with for many years and can call upon at a moment's notice. If you would like to be part of such a system, you must register with an organization before a disaster strikes, so that your qualifications and experience may be reviewed and your paperwork put in order.

**10. I understand that disaster relief personnel are professionals and they must have the appropriate skills and training before they are sent on overseas assignments. I am interested in pursuing international disaster relief and humanitarian assistance as a career. Can you point me in the right direction to get the appropriate degrees and training?**

An increasing number of colleges and universities offer degrees in humanitarian fields including Public Health, International Affairs, Economics, International Development, and International Humanitarian Assistance Law. Within these degrees there are a number of humanitarian sectors to focus on, including health, water/sanitation/hygiene, logistics, nutrition, shelter, risk reduction and protection. A quick Internet search can provide a wealth of information. However, other skill sets are increasingly needed in the humanitarian field and those with professional backgrounds such as Communications, NGO management, Human Resources, Accounting, Nutrition and a myriad other skills may also find opportunities in the sector.

## **SECURITY**

**11. I have relatives who are Canadian citizens and are living in the country where the disaster occurred. How do I find out if they are safe?**

The best resource is the DFATD's Consular affairs programme. General information can be obtained about the assistance to Canadians abroad at [travel.gc.ca](http://travel.gc.ca).

**12. We were planning to travel overseas, but from what I see on the news, I'm not sure if we should still go. I understand that the airport is open, but how do I find out whether it is still safe to travel?**

The Consular affairs programme is your best resource for this as well. For information regarding travel warnings and other related information, please visit the travel-related section of the DFATD's web site at [travel.gc.ca](http://travel.gc.ca) for up-to-date information about your destination.

## **INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION**

**13. I have seen on television that many of the disaster victims have been orphaned. How can I adopt these children?**

In most cases it is preferable to place orphaned children with members of their extended family or with other families of the same culture. For these reasons and others, international adoption can be a very complicated and lengthy process. Additional information may be obtained through the DFATD's web site at <http://travel.gc.ca/travelling/children/international-adoption>.

## **INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS**

**14. I work for the law firm (or public relations firm) of a large corporation. I have been asked to find out how to make a large material corporate donation. What are my next steps?**

First, you must visit the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada's website for more information. You will find useful information about the financial, cultural and logistical factors to consider, as well as information on the quantity and quality of the gift, the requirements for transportation and storage. If you want to donate to a humanitarian organization, it is best to contact the organization directly for more information. Otherwise, cash donations the best way to help the international relief effort.

**15. My company is interested in pursuing business opportunities in a country that has recently experienced a major disaster. What is the best resource for investigating my options?**

The Canadian Trade Commissioner Service has a wonderful program for assisting Canadian companies that wish to do business abroad. For additional information, visit the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service at [www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca](http://www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca).