

The Royal Army Medical Corps organised at its Training Centre in Mytchett, Hampshire, England, from the 6-8 October 1972, an Exercise called HELPING HAND. It was defined as 'An enquiry into the Means whereby Medical Aid could be provided in Natural Disasters'. I was honoured to give the opening keynote address which I called "Disasters Past and Future". As I was at the time a Staff Member of the *Daily Telegraph*, their Managing Director kindly ordered the printing of 1000 copies of my lecture for distribution to the V.I.P. audience. The British Director General of Army Medical Services, Lieutenant General Sir Norman Talbot, invited his colleagues of equivalent rank and seniority of the Royal Navy and The Royal Air Force as well as his colleagues from the USA, Canada, France and Australia. It was the most distinguished medical audience I ever addressed, all senior staff of the Army Medical Services from many parts of the world.

I had been deeply concerned about the lack of any International Rescue Organisation, an I.R.O., when reporting in the *Daily Telegraph* about technological accidents, and even worse about the muddles, inefficiencies and duplications which always occurred when individual countries sent aid for the victims of natural disasters, like floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and hurricanes. At the time, one of the greatest disasters was a flood in East Pakistan in 1970 where the official estimate was 1 million people drowned.

My first pleading for 'International Rescue' was published in the *Daily Telegraph Magazine* in November 1967, and I repeated this appeal when I reported about the Floods in East Pakistan. These articles may have been the reason why I was asked to give the keynote address at 'Exercise Helping Hand'—I was never told officially. However, this invitation and my large files on the subject of disasters allowed me to propose details for an I.R.O. which I incorporated in my review of past disasters and forecast of future ones.

I laid down Rescue Priorities consisting of the Establishment of a Chain of Command, followed by Reconnaissance, the re-establishment of Communications, the evacuation of the injured, mobile hospitals, evacuation of disaster survivors and provision of water as well as sanitation for them, followed by the supply of food, clothing, heating and shelter.

A basic requirement for any efficient International Rescue Organisation would be to stockpile essential means for rescue and for aid to survivors. Such stockpiles should be located along the equator, allowing for the most rapid air dispatch to any disaster area in the Northern or Southern Hemisphere. Although these considerations were simple common sense, they have never been put into practice, and sad to report, never been implemented. Thirty years later, nothing has changed.