

COUNCIL OF ADMINISTRATION/POSTAL OPERATIONS COUNCIL
Committee 4 (Cooperation and Development)
Sustainable Development Project Group
Ad Hoc Group on Disaster Risk Management
Report and recommendations from the seminar on best practices regarding earthquakes, tsunamis and hurricanes in the postal sector (Santiago, Chile, 29–30 July 2014)
Memorandum by the International Bureau and the Chairman
(Agenda item 4)

1 Subject	References/paragraphs
Report and recommendations from the seminar on best practices regarding earthquakes, tsunamis and hurricanes in the postal sector, held in Santiago, Chile, on 29 and 30 July 2014.	§§ 1 to 17
2 Decision expected Take note of the report and make any relevant comments.	§ 18

I. Introduction

1 As part of its mandate to exchange lessons learned and best practices related to natural disasters and adapting them to the postal sector in general, the UPU Ad Hoc Group on Disaster Risk Management (AHG DRM) organized a seminar in Santiago, Chile, to learn from the country's experiences with earthquakes, tsunamis and tropical cyclones.

2 The seminar was organized in cooperation with CorreosChile. Participants included Chile's National Emergency Office of the Ministry of Interior and Public Security (ONEMI), and the disaster risk expert and regional representative from the UN Development Programme, to show how these organizations have applied their experience in the aftermath of a significant number of earthquakes and tsunamis. Other participants included representatives from Canada Post, La Poste France, the Cuban Ministry of Communications, Philippines Post, the United States Postal Service, the UPU and the Postal Union of the Americas, Spain and Portugal (PUASP). The Chairman of the Board of Directors of CorreosChile, the Chair of the AHG DRM and the UPU's International Bureau representative gave opening remarks and set the tone for the postal sector experience with an overview of recent worldwide earthquake, tropical storm and tsunami activity, focusing on the regions most affected by such events.

II. Results of discussion

3 It was agreed by the participants that all the best practices and recommendations from each presenter would be compiled into a single, generic document, which would be updated as necessary and to reflect the results of other potential seminars in the future. The group agreed that the following principles could be adopted by any postal operators when preparing for, responding to or recovering from natural disasters:

- Of primary concern for operators is determining the safety and whereabouts of all employees.
- Monitoring and assuring the well-being of employees – not just physical, but also psychological – is key to retaining employees and continuing operations.
- Operators should collaborate with national and local authorities before disasters occur to ensure that their response is coordinated with the governments.
- In promoting and maintaining the social role of the postal sector, the Post has the ability to "humanize" itself through the interaction of delivery staff with the community. This will enhance the community's trust in the postal sector.
- It is important to develop standard operating procedures so that all employees know what to do before, during and after a disaster.
- It is imperative to instil a culture of preparedness by conducting training and drills at least twice a year on these standard operating procedures for disasters.
- Before disasters occur, operators should identify and train capable managers who can provide strong leadership during emergencies.

4 Some of the lessons learned were based on CorreosChile's experience, and could also be adapted by other Posts, although they would require more extensive collaboration with policy makers, for example by establishing a law that requires organizations with more than 250 employees to put in place risk prevention measures and station a relevant expert at each location by region or zone. Other policies developed by Chile relate to the protection of national heritage sites in conjunction with the appropriate experts on cultural and historical matters, and the use of the postal network to deliver government subsidies to affected families.

5 The PUASP representative recommended drawing up a list of international experts as a resource for Posts in the aftermath of a disaster. Posts should take every opportunity to promote the sector with their government. The regional policy round tables organized by the UPU for 2015 could serve as a platform for further discussion and development of disaster risk reduction (DRR) proposals for the 2016 UPU Congress in Istanbul. CorreosChile recommended that a template be created to help Posts know how to approach the UPU for assistance and cooperation after a disaster, and proposed that this action be taken well before the UPU Congress. Canada spoke in favour of training as a key element, and said that resources should be leveraged from other international agencies, not just the United Nations, to develop training modules. Finally, Poste Italiane provided input and gave a presentation on the risk of volcanoes in Italy, and how the operator works with civil protection to prepare for this risk. It is expected that this will be shared at a future AHG DRM meeting.

III. Detailed presentation

CorreosChile's experience

6 CorreosChile then gave a comprehensive report on the Post's experience with the 8.8 magnitude earthquake that devastated Chile in 2010, affecting 80% of its population and taking 524 lives. The speaker presented general recommendations for before, during and after an earthquake that Correos has put in place to mitigate the effects of such natural disasters, and discussed building standards and other regulations that the government of Chile has developed in 1993 and since updated. Despite the extent of the world's fifth biggest earthquake in modern times, she noted that CorreosChile was able to resume 100% of its business operations just one week after the event, and discussed the steps it took to recover so quickly, noting the importance of accounting for employees, assessing damage, resuming connectivity in the network, and working with relevant authorities as key elements for continuity of operations. Special mention was made of the need to address employees' psychological as well as physical well-being and the key role that the postal sector played in the recovery phase alongside other government entities.

Lessons learned after recent natural disasters

7 Japan Post and the Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications made a detailed presentation on the country's disaster management policies and their application after the 9.0 magnitude earthquake that hit the country in 2011, when close to 16,000 lives were lost and 1.2 million properties were severely damaged. Sixty-two postal employees were among the dead; 583 post offices were forced to close temporarily. The presenter highlighted measures that Japan Post took in the immediate aftermath of the disaster to handle mail services (including setting up mobile and temporary post offices, alternative delivery points and temporary post office boxes for affected families), and the changes it has since made to its business continuity and emergency preparedness plans. Similar to CorreosChile, he noted the importance of establishing and maintaining collaboration with local and national entities during and after a disaster. He also identified potential measures that could be developed using ICT tools to work with the postal sector, including sharing evacuee lists to identify missing persons and transportation and road condition information to facilitate mail delivery.

8 USPS presented the United States' hurricane preparedness measures resulting from the experience with Hurricane Sandy in 2012. Sandy's storm surge and flood activity caused severe damage to public infrastructure and limited access to power, fuel, transportation channels and communications in general, all of which severely affected postal sector distribution centres and delivery. An action report was developed to improve preparedness, focusing on protection and mitigation measures, employee accounting and reporting, assessment of facilities, and collection and dissemination of relevant information on operations. The USPS representative spoke about the importance of regular employee training at local, regional and national levels, and briefed the participants on a recent national exercise on hurricanes and the overall postal programme for exercises.

9 The representative of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) discussed his experience as leader of the teams deployed to Haiti and the Philippines as part of a joint UPU–USPS effort to help the Posts after earthquake and typhoon events in 2010 and 2013, respectively. He noted that even the most minimal planning and preparedness measures could have mitigated the impact of these phenomena on the postal sector in each country, especially in terms of accounting for postal employees, protecting mail and infrastructure, and resuming even partial services. Simple measures like moving mail and postal equipment and vehicles to higher levels or higher ground away from water sources could have prevented extensive damage. Preparedness and emergency plans at the local and regional level would also have helped these Posts lessen their losses.

10 The CEO of PhilPost added her own testimonial following USPIS's presentation. She noted that Filipinos know about typhoons: the country is in a region where they occur 12 to 20 times per year, so awareness is not the issue; however, plans and alerts have not been executed in the past. The main issue after Typhoon Haiyan was accounting for postal staff, many of whom simply did not return to work or left the area, including managers in charge. There was no way to communicate among staff spread out over various locations, and once some did make contact, they requested to be relocated to another post office as they were traumatized by their experience. PhilPost also had trouble delivering undamaged mail, because many people had left with no forwarding address. The lack of interest or contact with local authorities was also a key factor that she said exacerbated the situation. She is now very committed to engaging the government at all levels.

Response to natural disasters

11 The representative of PUASP's Secretary General began the afternoon session by describing the restricted union's DRR activities in the region and explaining how intergovernmental organizations such as PUASP and the UPU could make governments aware of and promote the importance of postal sector participation in the management of natural hazards and disasters.

12 ONEMI presented its mission to plan, promote, coordinate and implement actions for prevention, response and rehabilitation against risk situations, emergencies and natural or man-made disasters. A key element relevant to the aim of the seminar is ONEMI's role in coordinating public, private and civil society entities in disaster risk reduction management. ONEMI described the creation, development and structure of its policies, calling it the "cycle of risk": prevention, mitigation and preparation before, response during, and recovery after a disaster.

13 After the 2010 earthquake, ONEMI updated and enhanced its activities by strengthening the public information and communication network to provide an early warning system for the entire country; enhancing the public's knowledge and trust in ONEMI, revising education and training projects for civil protection in line with the UNISDR and Hyogo frameworks; establishing a national seismology centre and national communications centre; strengthening standards for structures and functions, and generally fostering a culture of prevention and resilience. Slides with slogans such as "Prevention is fundamental; preparation is the key" or "Threats are natural; disasters are not" were prevalent in this presentation. Future challenges include establishing and maintaining synergy among technical agencies to enhance risk analyses and emergency alert systems in addition to the current mobile phone option; enhancing private sector involvement; drafting and implementing more expansive laws; developing a marketing plan for educating the population to enhance the current "Yo me preparo; Chile se prepara" (I am prepared; Chile is prepared) programme; standardizing a single emergency network; enhancing risk maps and developing risk scenarios. The ONEMI representative ended his presentation by noting that "being prepared is everyone's responsibility". Regarding the role of postal sector, he explained that the capacity of what it could do had to be determined; the postal network would have to have extensive capacity and logistical resources in prevention activities. It could also promote social awareness, for example, by issuing stamps on relevant themes and providing assistance in distribution of information.

The role of the UN in DRM

14 The UNDP Chile office made a presentation on the role of the UN system in DRR. The speaker noted that experience in recent years and a better understanding of the phenomenon of natural disasters has resulted in advances to reduce the risk of mortality, but that much work remains to be done, including three major concerns: climate change and environmental risks; the growth of cities and unplanned urban development leading to greater urban risks; and the vulnerability gap related to insufficient or non-existent investment in DRR activities. He reviewed the principles and guidelines of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) as the most important tool for the implementation of DRR measures adopted by 168 governments of the UN system. As noted by the UPU representative at the beginning of the seminar, the HFA's overall objective is to increase the resilience of countries and communities to disasters by achieving a significant reduction of the losses they cause in terms of their life and of social goods and economic and environmental assets. In addition to financial and human resources, the HFA requires strong international and local commitment in order to be effective and sustainable.

15 The UNDP also spoke of the UNISDR framework and its plan at the 2015 World Conference on Disaster Reduction to integrate development of agendas, DRR and climate change policies including technology, reducing vulnerability, understanding risk and capacity building. In conclusion, the UNDP encouraged the postal sector to pursue the means to contribute to DRR and suggested it could serve to organize and distribute worldwide donations that come into countries after a natural disaster. Posts were also encouraged to work with the relevant agencies and the private sector to distribute staples and other necessary items to affected families, similar to the way PhiPost had been used after Typhoon Haiyan.

16 The UPU International Bureau made the final presentation on how the UPU has adapted the HFA and UNISDR frameworks for the postal sector and identified eight priorities relevant to the sector. The speaker also emphasized the actions the UPU will be taking to implement these priorities, including guidelines and training modules, improved monitoring and evaluation of Posts' efforts in DRR, identification of best practices, enhanced cooperation between designated operators and national and local government, and improved methods of sharing information.

Conclusions

17 The seminar ended the following day with a visit to the Meteorological Research Centre at the University of Chile, where seismic and related activity is monitored, in cooperation with ONEMI. The Director of the centre gave a detailed presentation on global seismic activity and how GPS technology has, in the past few years, significantly enhanced scientists' and experts' ability to monitor, measure and more closely predict natural disasters worldwide, enabling them to provide early warning to populations.

IV. Decision expected

18 The ad hoc group is invited to take note of the report and make any relevant comments.