

## BACKGROUND

### HOW CANADIANS CAN HELP

Canadians have always responded generously to international appeals for assistance in times of emergency and disaster. Some citizens have often found unique and successful ways of making their own contribution to those in need, and their efforts are worthy of praise.

While donations of goods are made in the spirit of generosity, it is the consensus of experts in the field that in-kind gifts can sometimes lead to more headaches than relief.

- It is often impossible to ensure the quality of donated goods.
- Transportation costs can be extremely high, and, if the goods are inappropriate or in the wrong proportions, the money will not be well spent.
- Relief personnel on the ground can lose valuable time sorting and distributing items that are frequently available locally, or much closer to the area in need, at less cost.
- Donations of out-of-date medicines and medical supplies can do more harm than good. Food and clothing may be inappropriate for the region. In some parts of the world, items such as used clothing and blankets may be subject to import regulations requiring fumigation or wrapping.
- An emergency situation is not the time to start trying to establish a distribution network in unfamiliar territory.

In general, individuals wishing to help are encouraged to make financial contributions to internationally recognized, non-governmental agencies that have the experience and the contacts necessary to distribute aid quickly and efficiently. These organizations conduct detailed assessments and develop lists of items most desperately required. They can often buy the goods at special prices, ensuring that each dollar donated is well spent.

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