

Up Front: An Issue of

Anyone who has caught a recent news broadcast is aware that there is unprecedented turmoil in many parts of the world as the result of natural disasters, civil uprisings and a myriad of other crises. Since we at DFAIT face this reality on a 24-7 basis, *Our World* has dedicated this current issue to how we come together to prepare for, manage and respond to international emergencies.

“It is truly a department-wide effort,” says Associate Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Gérald Cossette, who adds that almost all DFAIT staff were either directly involved or supported those who helped with the series of crises that occurred over the past several months.

From the dedication of staff at Headquarters and in missions to the effective management structure that has evolved to cope with all types of emergencies, “we are getting this right,” stresses Blair James, recently retired assistant deputy minister of the Consular Services and Emergency Management Branch.

DFAIT has matured and grown in terms of emergency management and now represents a whole-of-government platform, says Elissa Golberg, former director general of the Stabilization and Reconstruction Task Force. She recalls a time when there were only three people in the unit; today there are 63. They work with a much broader scope, especially given additional resources and ever-growing demands. “It’s night and day,” Golberg says, noting that each new experience brings lessons that are integrated into their practices. “You’re always learning new things.”

DFAIT, meanwhile, “is developing new tools and systems to become more nimble and effective in our response,” says Debora Brown, Director General of the Foreign Policy Communications Bureau. “Collaboration within DFAIT on emergency management has become an art for us,” adds Brown, especially with strong leadership from the government. “It’s the whole department working together as a single organism—in extraordinary times.”

Extraordinary times, indeed. In this edition of *Our World*, we profile an ambassador who recently lived through a distressing international evacuation, two management consular officers deployed to Haiti following the devastating earthquake, and an employee providing support for families affected by tragedies. We look at how DFAIT prepares for emergencies through exercises, planning, training and the renewed Emergency Response Community. And we offer some tips on personal preparedness for you and your family at home and abroad.

Articles in this issue also include an examination of how DFAIT helps the Canadian private sector contribute resources during emergencies and a report on how communications plays a critical role during crises. Among our regular features, we highlight the Cairo mission following Egypt’s civil unrest and introduce the neighbours who lend a hand at crisis time.

Finally, we offer a sneak-preview of the department’s new Operations Centre, which opens this fall. “It will be a great addition to DFAIT’s ability to respond effectively to any crisis—in fact multiple, simultaneous crises,” says Cossette, who is responsible for consular affairs and emergency management in the department.

We hope that you will both enjoy and learn from the articles that follow and join us in saluting all of our colleagues who respond to emergencies around the globe.

