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WVA Position Statement on the Protection of Animals During Disasters and Armed Conflict

WVA POSITION

Animals are sentient beings capable of feeling fear, distress, and pain, but protection of their needs is insufficiently considered during armed conflict or disaster management.¹ Veterinary authorities in each country should have an approved and appropriately resourced contingency plan for veterinary emergency care, rescue, and relief support of domestic and captive wild animals as part of their National Disaster Preparedness Plan.

The plan should consider the specific local circumstances and, at minimum, provide for:

- 1) Registry and coordination of animal facilities for shelter, species-specific feed and potable water, and emergency veterinary care of domestic and captive wild animals, whenever possible, and relocation to a safe environment or euthanasia or humane depopulation² of animals under veterinary supervision, when this is not possible;
- 2) Specialised workforces trained to provide veterinary emergency care and support and proactive care (including consideration of preventative veterinary care, exclusion of disease outbreaks, and euthanasia and emergency depopulation), with needed equipment and supplies;
- 3) Maintaining displaced civilians together with their companion animals, in addition to safely evacuating other animals, when possible, to enhance the safety, security, and mental resiliency of people and optimize care of animals;
- 4) Veterinary care and management of working animals used for transportation, intelligence services, and other activities during disasters and armed conflict; and
- 5) Protection of wildlife habitats and migration corridors, whenever possible, to mitigate the effects of armed conflict or disasters on ecosystems and animal species.

BACKGROUND

Armed conflict and largescale natural disasters have very different origins but may ultimately have similar devastating impacts on human and animal lives. This includes domestic and wild animal species that live in water, on land or in the air. Agencies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

1. A. Peters & J. De Hemptinne. Animals in War: At the vanishing point of international humanitarian law. *Int Rev Red Cross*. 2022, 19:1285-1314.
2. WVA Position Statement on Depopulation of Animals
3. WOAHA Guideline on Disaster Management and Risk reduction in relation to animal health and welfare and veterinary public health. <https://emvetnet.izs.it/emvet/#/standards>
4. <https://www.ifaw.org/uk/programmes/disaster-response>

(UNHCR) have been developed to provide support and relief for people during natural disasters and armed conflict. No uniform framework³ or system exists in countries around the world for the rescue and care of domestic and animals impacted during and after major environmental disasters and armed conflict. There is an urgent need for national preparedness plans and coordinated international veterinary relief geared towards support of domestic and captive wild animals, as well as consideration of protections of ecosystems and habitats of wild animals during armed conflict and natural disasters. At an individual animal or farm level, animal owners, farmers and producer groups should be aware of risks specific to their community and region and should prepare an emergency plan that covers likely eventualities to protect their animals and property in the event of a crisis⁴.