

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

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WVA POSITION

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

The plan should provide for:

- 1) Coordination of shelter, species-specific food 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, with needed equipment and supplies;
- 3) Maintaining displaced civilians together with their companion animals, as much as possible, to enhance mental resiliency of people and optimize care of animals;
- 4) Appropriate veterinary care and management of working animals used for transportation, intelligence and other activities during disasters and armed conflict; and
- 5) Protection of wildlife habitats and migration corridors, whenever possible, to mitigate effects of armed conflict on endangered ecosystems and animal species.

BACKGROUND

Armed conflict and natural disasters have very different origins but may ultimately have similar devastating impacts on human and animal lives. This includes domestic and captive or free-ranging 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 (UNHCR) have been developed to provide support and relief for people during natural disasters and armed conflict. No uniform framework or system exists in countries around the world for the rescue and care of domestic and captive wild animals impacted during and after major environmental disasters and armed conflict. There is an urgent need for national preparedness plans and coordinated international 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.

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