

Announcement: First annual international and comparative disaster law essay contest

20 October 2014

Introduction

This announcement sets out the rationale and rules for the first annual “International and comparative disaster law essay contest.” This contest will be co-sponsored by the [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies](#) (IFRC), the American Society of International Law [Disaster Law Interest Group](#) (ASIL DLIG), the [International Disaster Law Project](#) (IDL) of the Universities of Bologna, Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna, Roma Tre and Uninettuno, with support from the [International Institute of Humanitarian Law](#).

Background

Over the last decade, “natural” disasters, such as floods, earthquakes, droughts and tsunamis, killed over 1.1 million people and affected nearly 2 billion worldwide. While disasters happen everywhere, their effects are lopsidedly punishing to developing countries, and to the poor and most vulnerable communities in every country. They are already one of the key threats to human security worldwide – and their impact is increasing.

Due to advances in the science of disaster risk management, we now know that there are no true “natural disasters.” Many “natural” hazards are sparked or accelerated by human activity and no matter how “natural” the hazard, it is human exposure, vulnerability, resilience and preparedness that defines whether a given event results merely in a rainy day or a national catastrophe. Unlike the weather, human behaviour can be regulated.

Scholarship about legal and regulatory frameworks for reducing disaster risks, responding to disasters and recovering from them, is still in its infancy. Yet states are increasingly turning to legal tools to fight disasters, at the national, regional and international levels. Are they learning from each other about what works well and what does not? Are international instruments meeting their potential to increase cooperation in disaster risk management and humanitarian response?

This essay contest aims to stimulate creative thinking and analysis about disaster law in a comparative and/or international perspective.

Eligibility and requirements:

- The contest is open only to students enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate degree program at any university (anywhere in the world) at the time of submission.
- Essays may examine any issue related to law and disasters due to natural hazards, but must do so either from a comparative or an international law perspective, or both. Comparative essays should examine laws or legal issues from no less than three countries. A sample list of potential topics is included below (merely for purposes of illustration).
- Papers must be written solely by the candidate(s), in English, and may not have been submitted for publication elsewhere. (This restriction will be lifted after the contest is completed, and, for

With support from:



International Institute of Humanitarian Law
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the winners and “honourable mention” papers, after publication as IFRC Working Papers). Papers may have more than one author, so long as all authors meet all the other criteria listed here.

- Citation style should conform to the “Oxford University Standard of Citation for Legal Authorities” (4th ed. 2012), available without cost online at:
 - http://www.law.ox.ac.uk/published/OSCOLA_4th_edn_Hart_2012.pdf
- Submissions may range from 5,000 to 10,000 words, including footnotes.

Deadline and method of submission

- The deadline for submissions is **11:59 p.m. Central European Time, 30 January 2015**.
- Essays should be submitted to disaster.law@ifrc.org as Microsoft Word attachments. In the subject line, please state “Submission: International and Comparative Disaster Law Essay Contest”. Questions may be directed to the same email address.
- By submitting papers, candidates represent that they fulfil the eligibility requirements of the competition. The organizers may request formal proof of eligibility.
- All candidates will receive an e-mail confirming that their submissions have been received. They may not be contacted again until winners are selected.

Competition procedures and selection criteria

- On a separate first page only, each entry should include: the title, author’s name, author’s mailing address, email address, and phone number, university name and address, year in school, and expected graduation date. In addition, contestants should include the following sentence, along with a submission date and signature of the author(s): “[Name of author] is the sole author of this paper and complies with all requirements of this contest. This paper has not been submitted for publication elsewhere. In the event that it is selected as the winner or “honourable mention”, the author agrees that it may be published by the IFRC as a “Working Paper” series according to its standard terms.”
- The title only should be repeated on the second page. No identifying information (including name, name of university, etc.) should be included anywhere other than on the first page.
- The administrator will detach the first page, and each submitter will be assigned a number. Reviewers will refer only to those numbers in their communications.
- All submissions will go through an initial screening process by several readers. Each reader will assign a rating on a scale of 1-10 (10 best, 1 worst), taking into account the following criteria: relevance to the field of disaster management; originality, depth and persuasiveness of legal analysis and recommendations; quality of writing; thoroughness of research and style, and proper citation of sources. Bearing in mind that some contestants will not be native English speakers, grammar issues will be accorded less weight than might otherwise be the case. The papers with the highest average scores will be reviewed by a final panel of judges, who will agree on a winner and up to three runners-up. All readers and judges will be selected by the

conference co-sponsors, including approval by the ASIL DLIG Advisory Committee.

- Reviewers and judges will be selected by agreement of the co-sponsors of the contest.

Award and announcement

- The winner of the contest will receive:
 - A waiver of fees and support for travel (up to a maximum of USD 1,600 on economy fare) and accommodation in order to attend the week-long “[International Disaster Law Course](http://www.iihl.org/idlcourse)” (www.iihl.org/idlcourse) organized by the IDL and IFRC and hosted by the International Institute for Humanitarian Law in Sanremo, Italy, on 27th April to Friday 1st May 2015.
 - A free annual membership in the American Society of International Law and waiver of fees for attendance of the 2015 Annual meeting on April 11-15, 2015.
- The winner and runners will also have their papers published as “[Working Papers](#)” of the IFRC’s Disaster Law Programme. They will retain copyright of their papers and may subsequently publish them elsewhere, according to the terms of the Working Papers series.
- A message announcing the name of the winner and runners up of the contest will be sent to all members of the ASIL DLIG, as well as to the co-sponsors and made public on the ASIL website. An e-mail with the final outcome will also be sent to all who submitted papers.

Sample topics

As noted above, participants are free to choose any topic they like related to law and disasters linked to natural hazards. The following are a few potential themes provided only by way of illustration:

- What impact do existing disaster law treaties have on domestic disaster management?
- Can mandatory insurance rules reduce disaster risks in developing countries?
- Is there a customary duty to seek international assistance when local resources are overcome by a disaster?
- How can legislation improve post-disaster economic recovery?
- Should the rules for humanitarian assistance be different in conflicts and disasters?
- What is the role of domestic courts in improving the safety and resilience of communities?
- What are the pros and cons of a rights-based approach to disaster response?
- What are the prospects for a comprehensive global treaty on international disaster assistance?
- Should there be a global system of certifying humanitarian NGOs?
- Why aren’t land use rules and building codes preventing more deaths and losses?
- What special protections do indigenous peoples require with respect to disasters?
- How do derogations and limitations to human rights in disasters affect outcomes for affected persons?
- What is the right balance between sovereignty and protection when it comes to international disaster response?
- What are the most reasonable and successful governmental approaches to post-disaster compensation to affected persons?
- How can we reduce legal barriers to speedy and equitable housing solutions after disasters?