

Interpol Disaster Victim Identification

Principles of Good DVI Governance

1. Issue

In our present-day global society, disasters rarely have a singular national impact. Frequently, the victims are citizens from several countries.

Consequently, the authorities of countries whose citizens have become victims of a disaster have a joint responsibility for the ethical, transparent and humane treatment of all victims. Nevertheless, it is the authorities of the country where the disaster has occurred who have chief responsibility in dealing with the victims. The independence and the applicable legal system of the disaster stricken country are internationally accepted and respected.

This basic principle also applies to the process of disaster victim identification (DVI). In order to support and assist with the identification of the deceased, DVI teams from countries which have citizens believed to be victims of the disaster are often sent to assist the country in which the disaster has occurred. In recent years, because there have been no clearly defined guidelines and international principles, there has, at times, been confusion for both the country of authority and those providing assistance regarding mutual roles and responsibilities.

This document establishes and outlines a basis for the coordination of tasks, responsibilities and authorities within the DVI process.

2. Purpose

Having clearly outlined principles help synchronize political, diplomatic, law enforcement and other institutionalized components of a strategy, by allowing leaders of a country to understand the ultimate aim and purpose of the DVI support offered to a country immediately after a disaster occurred.

3. Basic Principles

3.1 Coordination

The principles are designed to assist, on a universal basis, any DVI process in a disaster stricken area and to prevent the inadvertent escalation of a situation that may lead to conflict or non-cooperation between stakeholders. These guidelines strive to follow general precepts of law.

3.2 Commitment

The Interpol DVI GUIDE and the use of the Interpol DVI forms are the universally accepted standards for the process of identification.

3.3 Case Independent

Challenges pertaining to the principles vary according to each disaster scenario or situation. Although they are not fail-safe, respecting these principles will help to ensure that proper international standards are maintained in the DVI scenario.

4. The Principles of Good DVI Governance

Coordination of the following activities is of crucial importance and indispensable for effective disaster response. Coordination starts immediately after a disaster has occurred and the need for a DVI process has been identified.

4.1 Law, Legislation and National Conventions

All processes are governed by the laws, legislation and conventions of the affected country. In addition, in certain cases there may be rules, specified by governments and/or command authorities which govern the circumstances in which the DVI process must operate and to what degree.

4.2 Interpol DVI Standards

The basis for all actions must respect the internationally accepted standards as outlined by Interpol DVI. This includes the entire DVI process from the working methods employed to the documents to be used. Departure from these standards can only be justified in special circumstances. All persons who will be involved in the DVI process are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the information contained on the Interpol DVI website at www.interpol.int and to seek guidance and assistance from those who are familiar with the DVI standards. INTERPOL Lyon is always prepared to assist with (international) coordination, assessment and communication requirements that may surface.

4.3 Command and Control

Coordination of a disaster response can be ensured only on the basis of a properly functioning command structure. In most cases, a number of different agencies and organizations with different functions and responsibilities are required to work together. Chaos can be avoided by implementing a clearly defined command structure such as, for example, the gold, silver and bronze standard.

The command authorities of the nation in charge of the DVI operation must put in place a clear command and control system and standard channels of communication as soon as possible.

4.4 Information Management and Status Analysis

Due to the uncertainty regarding the extent of damage caused by the disaster, and possibly, the lack of reliable information, initial emergency responses following a disaster are often difficult to set up.

Coordination at all levels is urgently needed to obtain a correct analysis of the situation.

4.5 Identification of Required Personnel and Material Resources

An estimate of the support needed must be made as soon as possible and must take into account the working conditions, the available infrastructure, the potential number of victims and their nationalities, and finally, the condition of the bodies.

In addition to the required number of personnel and subject matter experts required, an estimate of support must include the materials required, both for assisting the DVI teams and experts, and for supporting logistics, such as refrigeration systems for the bodies.

4.6 Communication/Information

Accurate information regarding the identification of missing victims to their families and local authorities must be provided through standard channels of communication in accordance with agreements made within the Strategic Staff.

5. Operational Procedures

5.1 Operational Standard

The standards for the DVI process must be based on Interpol DVI Standards which can be obtained at www.interpol.int

5.2 Command and Control

Organise the command and control structure on the basis of the identification process. In addition to the strategic, tactical and operational command standards, (such as gold, silver and bronze standards), ensure there is sufficient support and that information management centres are properly staffed.

5.3 Command on Scene

Coordination of incident site operations is critical and is accomplished through a unified on-scene commander. Roles and responsibilities of responding agencies should be determined and communicated by Command Staff before deployment. If the incident involves mass fatalities, the relevant Authority should establish the operational protocol between the Search, Rescue and Recovery (SRR) teams and the DVI response. During the initial stages of the response, an early, efficient management of the corpses is critical.

5.4 Assessment

Assessment subject matter experts in the DVI process should carry out an assessment to determine what qualitative and quantitative deployment is required as well as, what logistical and financial challenges need to be addressed.

5.5 Identification of Required Human and Material Resources

After the assessment has been completed, determine the human and logistical resources to be requested, taking into consideration, the condition and number of bodies, the number of nationalities potentially involved, and the continuity of the DVI process.

5.6 Reconciliation, Release and Repatriation and of the Bodies

After the minimum standards of identification have been satisfied, consultation with the official representatives from the nations involved concerning the formal processes of reconciliation, release and repatriation of the identified bodies must occur as soon as possible.

5.7 Information management

Information Management Accurate information regarding the identification of victims to families, local authorities and official foreign representatives must be provided. Pay special attention to the collection of valid ante-mortem (AM) data from all contributors by establishing a proper communication process ensuring the accurate collection of the required data.

5.8 Financial Reporting

Financial Process Throughout the entire process of dealing with a disaster, unforeseen expenses will be incurred by many. To ensure accurate financial reporting, a financial process which is clear to all involved parties must be established. The person responsible for the finances must also have financial authority over the DVI process.

5.9 Evaluation

Evaluation upon termination of the DVI process, a review and evaluation should take place. Not only will a permanent audit team be able to suggest implementation improvements and identify best practices, but an evaluation process that is set up early can also save a great deal of time and energy in the final, concluding phases of the disaster response operation.