INTRODUCTION

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EMERGENCY RELIEF operations are the starting point for most international humanitarian assistance programs. Wanton killing and brutality within supposedly sovereign borders, ethnic and religious strife, millions of near-starving refugees, other millions of migrants fleeing their homes out of fear for their lives, human rights trampled down, appalling poverty in the shadows of extraordinary wealth, inhumanity on an incredible scale in what was supposed to be a peaceful dawn following the Cold War—these are the awesome challenges that face the world community and are quite different from the nation state rivalries and alliances that preoccupied statesmen during most of the last century. More and more, these humanitarian crises are immediately known to us in an era of instant communications, demand a response, and, as is pointed out in the companion volume, *Basics of International Humanitarian Missions*, that response, to be effective, cannot be mere compassion or sympathy but must reflect an emerging science and the strengths of multiple partners.

The desire to respond to natural or man-made disasters is strong in every culture and on every continent. However, as the contributors to these books point out, the disasters of today are more complex and more dangerous than ever before, and an effective and well-coordinated response must be multidisciplinary. Some areas of the world, for historical, ethnic, and political reasons, are disaster prone. Complex humanitarian crises, sadly, have become a common interface between developed and developing nations, between rich and poor, the haves and the have nots. Those of us privileged to participate in great humanitarian

dramas have the opportunity adversity offers to build a new framework, using, and sometimes rediscovering, the best of the old structures, but realizing that a new spirit and innovative methods are necessary for international discourse in a new millennium. Our success—or failure—will, to a large extent, define the chances for the very survival of the world.

Almost five hundred years ago, in a small book that remains a classic text on politics and diplomacy, Machiavelli shrewdly employed the semantics of health to explain a fundamental tenet of governing; he wrote: “When trouble is sensed well in advance, it can easily be remedied; if you wait for it to show, any medicine will be too late because the disease will have become incurable. As the doctors say of a wasting disease, to start with it is easy to cure but difficult to diagnose; after a time, unless it has been diagnosed and treated at the outset, it becomes easy to diagnose but difficult to cure. So it is in politics.” And so it is in humanitarian assistance.

This is the second volume in Fordham University Press’s “International Humanitarian Affairs” series. In this book we consider the challenges that one must deal with before, during, and immediately after a disaster—from trying to identify disaster-prone areas and predict crises, to developing early warning systems, devising rapid assessment measures for health, nutrition, and housing in the early days of a humanitarian crisis. Contributors consider the incredible problems faced by refugees and internally displaced persons and focus especially on the plight of women and children and the severely malnourished. But merely measuring medical abnormalities fails to provide a true picture of societies in crisis, and this book also offers reflections on those fundamental violations of human rights that underlie most disasters. The logistical needs for supplying potable water, adequate shelter, and basic sanitation systems are part of any emergency relief operation. We review the response of international organizations, such as the United Nations, and the interaction of the military and nongovernmental organizations during the emergency relief phase. Security for staff deserves the careful atten-

tion that a separate chapter provides. One of the important first steps in entering a complex humanitarian crisis is figuring out how and when one is going to depart, and to attempt as smooth an exit as possible. The book is divided into four sections.