

How to Write Key Messages

The **TITLE** should include the name of the emergency and reflect whether the key messages are on behalf of the Emergency Relief Coordinator or the Humanitarian Coordinator. Specify the date and the issue number in the series.

Example: ERC Key Messages on the Situation in Gaza
12 January 2009, Issue No. 2

Example: Zimbabwe Key Messages
Authorized by the Humanitarian Coordinator
27 January 2009, Issue No. 4

When drafting a **KEY MESSAGE** consider the following: What needs to be done now to save lives and alleviate suffering? What are the potential consequences of delays, inaction or intransigence? What is the scope of the disaster? What are the needs of the people affected? Are there protection or access issues? The key messages should...

- **HIGHLIGHT** urgent needs:

Example: Lives are on the line. The risks posed by disease, displacement and deprivation – and further unnecessary death – increase with each passing day.

Example: The humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe is acute and is worsening. Zimbabwe's political impasse has plunged the country ever deeper into an economic and humanitarian crisis. This is a critical moment to support humanitarian efforts in Zimbabwe.

- **ARTICULATE** how the United Nations and partners can help:

Example: A multilateral humanitarian response is necessary because of the enormous scale of this disaster. The response must be presented in a way that will be found acceptable by national authorities.

- **ADVOCATE** the use of further resources to do so:

Example: Massive logistical support is needed for an effective response, including the use of external assets. While we are investigating possible logistical hubs, we note with regret that the Government has not yet accepted the many offers made by other countries to provide these assets.

- **REITERATE** humanitarian principles:

Example: The humanitarian community continues to call on the parties to facilitate immediate, safe and unimpeded access for humanitarian agencies to the affected areas that remain unreachable.

- **DEFUSE** any controversial issues that are being raised or are likely to be raised by the media or donors:

Example: We remain very concerned about the well-being of the civilian population. All parties are to be reminded of their obligation to respect civilians and to take appropriate steps to ensure their protection, in accordance with International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law, including by taking steps to re-establish law and order.

Some of the messages may not change from day to day. If they remain the same then reference this clearly with a [FOOTNOTE](#).

Example: The impact of rising food and fuel prices*.
*Please see previous guidance on this issue, as it remains unchanged.

[UPDATED INFORMATION](#) in a key message should be in bold. Reference this with a footnote upon first use of bold type.

Example: In addition to causing large numbers of casualties, the bombing and ground campaign are causing significant trauma to the civilian population, especially the **56 percent of Gaza residents under the age of 18****.

** Updated information highlighted in bold.

Key Messages can include an [INTERNAL GUIDANCE](#) section in the form of “*If asked only*” or “*Issues to watch*”. Internal Guidance should always be in italics.

If asked only

Q: How is the United Nations preparing for a possible dramatic rise in the number of Ethiopians who need assistance?

A: The new seasonal assessment figures are under discussion. OCHA, the Government and humanitarian partners are exploring the possibility of revising the joint UN-Government Humanitarian requirements document.

Issues to watch

Cluster Munitions:

Human Rights Watch has alleged (15 August) that Russia used cluster munitions in populated areas, killing at least 11 civilians and injuring many more. This is the first, and so far the only, report of the use of cluster munitions and has not yet been verified by the United Nations or other sources. If true, this would raise questions of compliance with International Humanitarian Law and require the decontamination of land.

Note: For more advice on ERC Key Messages and Field Key Messages, refer to the Standard Operating Procedures and embedded templates.