

INTERACTIVE PANEL 3: ICTs for public safety: Emergency Telecommunications and Climate Change

Summary

The objective of this session was to have Panelists debating on the critical role that emergency telecommunications play in both risk reduction and in disaster management, making an immense contribution to saving lives; and how telecommunications/ICTs can make a valuable contribution to climate change monitoring, mitigation and adaptation. Participated in this Session Jaime GUERRERO, Minister of Telecommunications and Information Society, Ecuador; Darcy BOYCE, Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office (Energy, Immigration, Telecommunications and Investment), Barbados; Jerrol THOMPSON, Special Adviser to the Prime Minister on ICTs, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Robert FROEHLER, President of Rohde & Schwarz Latin America; Rodolfo A. GARCIA, President Terremark Latin America; Clovis BAPTISTA NETO, Executive Secretary, Inter-American Telecommunication Commission (CITEL); Bernadette LEWIS, Secretary-General, Caribbean Telecommunication Union (CTU).

The Session was moderated by ITU Deputy Secretary General, Mr. Haolin Zhao. In his introductory remarks Mr. Zhao highlighted that when disasters strike ICTs play a critical role in providing vital information for decision making, and coordination of humanitarian agencies involved in the search and rescue operations, providing food, shelter and medication for the benefit of the victims.

The discussions centered on (1) Public-Private Partnerships (2) Coordination among public services - social development plans – disaster preparedness (3) information sharing (4) Spectrum management, monitoring and usage (5) regulatory aspects (6) capacity building.

Several challenges were raised during the discussions: Regulation should not prevent action; national plans for emergency situations; reinforce Radio Amateurs Community; need of frequent exercises. It was mentioned the convenience of a geographical information system and satellite imagery to pinpoint facilities that may have been lost or damaged at the strike of a disaster. The cloud was mentioned as the ideal place to store information that can be externally accessed in the event of a disaster. Information sharing and lessons learned from other countries' experiences, what worked, what didn't work, can be vital to review and adjust national plans. Emergency mobile roaming to

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ensure more effective coverage was raised as a suggestion to be negotiated between government and operators. Early warning systems and frequent update of information has been noted as important actions to minimize fatalities. The devices may be available but may not work due to lack of batteries or knowledge on how to use them – therefore training appears as an important part – national plans should consider training in communities in remote and isolated areas with no access to basic information and communication facilities.

In their final remarks, Panelists endorsed a request made to ITU to continue coordination with other entities that work for relief and recovery of emergency situations in the countries of the region in order to concentrate efforts. Panelists suggested ITU to take the lead in the preparation of a Master Emergency Plan considering a 75 to 80% covering each country's needs and each country will work to complete the remaining 20%. One of the main outputs of this Session is the need for increased awareness of the fact that, although we cannot predict disaster, the better we are prepared the highest will be the chances to minimize the loss of human lives.
