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Secretary-General  
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For ‘Know Risk’ - UN Publication of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction

Disasters kill at least one million people each decade and leave millions more homeless. When disaster strikes, communications links are often disrupted; yet for disaster relief workers these links are essential in order to answer critical questions as to how many people have been injured or died, where the injured are located and the extent of the medical help needed. To put it simply, in disaster and emergency situations, telecommunications can save lives. However, without prior consent from local authorities, regulatory barriers can make it extremely difficult to rapidly deploy the telecommunication equipment required by humanitarian organizations. These challenges may soon be overcome.

The International Telecommunication Union, the United Nations specialized agency for telecommunications, along with the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), has been a driving force in drafting and promoting the Tampere Convention. The Tampere Convention will allow relief workers to make full use of today’s telecommunication tools, which are essential to coordinate the complicated logistics of rescue and relief operations.

While the Tampere Convention recognizes the right of States that are party to the Convention to direct, control and coordinate assistance provided under the Convention within its territory, it calls on States to facilitate the provision of prompt telecommunication assistance to mitigate the impact of a disaster. In particular it calls on States to waive regulatory barriers that impede the use of telecommunications. These barriers include the licensing requirements to use allocated frequencies, restrictions on the import of telecommunication equipment as well as limitations on the movement of humanitarian teams.

ITU is pleased to participate in the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction and welcomes your support for the Tampere Convention. Working with our UN and Industry partners, ITU will continue to help strengthen local, national and global telecommunication systems in order that they can respond quickly and consistently in emergency situations.

For nearly 140 years ITU has been helping the world communicate; a guiding mission that becomes even more important when disaster strikes.