

INTERNATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATION UNION

Telecommunication Development Bureau



STATEMENT

BY

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**Harnessing the Potential of Telecommunications for Effective
Disaster Management**

Alexandria, EGYPT (14 -17 April 2007)

Hon. Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

From the onset, I would like to welcome all of you to this event that ITU has co-organized with a host of our partners who include regional organizations and sister United Nations Organizations. The hosting of this event in this “Pearl of the Mediterranean” would not have been possible without the kind invitation by the Government and people of Egypt. As for me, Egypt is like home to me. A few years ago, I was lucky to be based in Cairo while working for the International Telecommunication Union. Out of habit, I would from time to time escape to visit the ancient city of Alexandria.

Mr. Chairman,

The impact and frequency of disasters are rapidly increasing at a world level with the affected countries suffering an undue amount of the burden in terms of loss of investment, cost of rebuilding, loss in unearned income and

disruption to economic activity. Not to mention, loss in human life.

Losses from future disasters with the potential to disrupt national economies and acting as impediments to sustainable development can be reduced if **Emergency Telecommunications** and risk management are integrated into comprehensive development planning that is built on improved knowledge base, public awareness resulting from good training and well designed educational programmes.

Any disaster reduction measure that is not linked to telecommunications does not go far enough. For this reason, a ubiquitous, resilient, and multi-hazard telecommunications network is critical, not only in linking networks of warning centers, seismic and water-level reporting stations that are sources of vital information but also in providing a **last mile** link before, during and after the disaster. Emergency Telecommunications facilitates the flow of vital information from Authority to Authority thus facilitating coordination, from Authority to Citizen for early

warning, from Citizen to Authority in search of information, and from Citizen to Citizen i.e between family members worried about the well-being of loved ones.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In general, developing countries are confronted by many development challenges especially the least developed and Small Island Developing States among them. One of these challenges has to do with low access to information and communication technologies exacerbated by populations that are widely dispersed making it difficult to provide them with essential services such as telecommunications. The people have very limited resources to buy the basic necessities of life and find the purchase of radios and televisions a luxury. Yet these are the very basic means of communication that, because of the entertainment they provide, should ordinarily be universally available. Authorities can then use them to disseminate information on early warning, and enhance the disaster preparedness effort.

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

ITU is ready to forge partnerships with all like-minded organizations with the aim of providing timely and quality assistance to all the Member States. This assistance includes putting in place strategies that will help you to effectively integrate information and communication technologies into disaster risk reduction initiatives such as:

1. Deployment of low-cost, appropriate and affordable technologies that can be mobilized for disaster reduction and mitigation.
2. Establishing ready resources that can be deployed immediately in the aftermath of disasters. ITU is working on a global framework that will bring together its 191 Member States and over 700 Sector Members who will pool resources. The resources will be deployed for the benefit of countries when needed. This ITU Framework for Cooperation in Emergencies (IFCE) is aimed at putting in places hi-tech systems that can easily be deployed anywhere in

the world with the target of being on the ground within the first 48 hours of a disaster striking. Of course, we intend to compliment any other efforts that are currently in place and will coordinate with our colleagues who have an operational role in the field such as OCHA, UNHCR, WHO, etc. They too, could access such resources once deployed in the field. As a United Nations Specialized Agency, ITU would like to fulfil its mandate as requested by its Convention and many other such resolutions. On 28 March, ITU had a very successful event on Emergency Telecommunications that was hosted by the Government of Indonesia. The participants welcomed this new initiative and requested that work on this was long overdue. We are already intensifying our work in this area.

3. Setting up of appropriate regulatory frameworks at national and regional levels. Also, helping the countries ratify and implement relevant international conventions. For instance, one of the greatest achievements in this area has been the coming into

effect of the Tampere Convention which eliminates regulatory barriers to cross-border deployment of telecommunications equipment. This convention came into effect on 8 January 2005. Thanks to this Convention, ITU was able to provide timely assistance to the countries affected by the Tsunami and the subsequent South Asia disaster. We deployed satellite equipment and fully paid for the airtime related to the use of that equipment in many other countries including those in the Caribbean Region. Such assistance is available to any of the 190 ITU Member States in the aftermath of a disaster. Some countries in this region have ratified this Convention but many others have not. It is important to note that this treaty does not in any way erode the sovereignty of nation states. Countries remain free to accept outside assistance or reject it. I understand that there will be special sessions on this issue later on.

4. Putting in place an ICT Policy that favours disaster risk reduction taking into account gender

mainstreaming and the special needs of people with disabilities.

5. Incorporating ICT applications and services into existing and new early warning systems. ITU is already working with Asian countries in this regard.
6. Assisting in negotiating concrete private and public sector partnerships that should ideally lead to co-financing arrangements for disaster reduction initiatives. ITU has already established these with many organizations and governments for other regions and is ready to assist in this regard as part of resource mobilization. The sponsorship that we received from some ITU Sector Members and other entities speaks volumes of the positive side of partnership building.
7. Finding innovative disaster risk reduction practices that maximize the use of already existing technologies such as TV, Radio, Mobile, radio amateur services and Internet for every stage of disaster management.

8. Developing databases, handbooks and manuals for training purposes. These could be delivered face-to-face and through e-education (online).
9. Establishing rules and procedures that facilitate the use of ICT technologies at every stage of a disaster. We are already finalizing work on Case Studies that will improve information sharing by Member States.

In conclusion, let me underline that any serious work on emergency telecommunications must take into account the forging of **multi-stakeholder partnerships**. No one single organization could do it alone as the complexity of the matter calls for a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral approach. ITU therefore invites other stakeholders to jointly build a solid Platform for Private and Public Partnerships (PPPP). In ITU, we have already put in place a strong inter-sectoral team that brings together experts from ITU's Standardization Bureau, Radio Communication Bureau and the Telecommunication Development Bureau. The Telecommunication Development Bureau is responsible of

coordinating this work and is committed to extend this successful approach at national and sub-regional levels.

I thank you.