



Telecoms for Disaster Relief: Tampere Convention

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Easing the way to Disaster Mitigation: The Tampere Convention

Statement by
Dr Marco Ferrari
Deputy Head of the Humanitarian Aid Department
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, SDC

It is an honour and a privilege to speak in this special Forum dealing with the Tampere Convention.

Over the past 14 years, "Tampere" has become a synonym for Telecommunications in Disaster Mitigation and Humanitarian Assistance. Tampere therefore stands for international, trans-border cooperation. The Convention is seen as a milestone in the area of international law applicable to disasters.

For Switzerland, and more specifically for the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), transborder cooperation has since long been regarded as a cornerstone for effective international efforts to mitigate disasters and expedite rescue operations after disasters occurred.

Over the past several years, Switzerland has been heavily involved in Disaster Reduction, including Prevention/Mitigation, Preparedness and Response. Consequently, we have actively participated in the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, from 18-22 January 2005 in Kobe, Hyogo prefecture, Japan.

Regarding the Tampere Convention, like 59 other countries, Switzerland has signed and like 29 others equally ratified the Convention, which finally has come into force on 8 January this year, upon ratification by 30 countries. Together with a few other countries we were involved in the elaboration of the Convention, and as the only donor since the Conference in 1998, have supported the Emergency Relief Coordinator and OCHA in their role as the operational coordinator for this Convention.

As demonstrated in the recent Tsunami response and in the Kobe conclusions regarding the disaster alert system and mitigation, the availability and use of interoperable and adequate telecommunication resources are indispensable tools for humanitarian relief and disaster mitigation. Public and private humanitarian relief agencies are often stunned to learn that hefty import duties must be paid for their telecommunications equipment, that they have serious problems to import and operate telecommunication equipment and that operators must obtain operating licenses before communicating within the area of disaster relief operations and with the outside world.



The Tampere Convention is a targeted effort to facilitate the provision of timely and effective telecommunication resources and of rapid, efficient information flows for disaster prevention and response. It does so in three important ways:

- Firstly by putting in place a structure for managing requests for telecommunication assistance and for minimizing the impediments to that assistance before disasters occur;
- Secondly by creating mechanisms for identifying and evaluating best practices, model agreements, and other valuable resources currently in use by disaster mitigation organisations – public and private – and for developing new ones where needed; and
- Thirdly, by attracting attention to the importance of this subject matter for people involved in disaster mitigation and relief and by exercising, if needed, multinational persuasion aimed at facilitating emergency telecommunication.

The Convention recognizes publicly that telecommunications are essential to dealing with disasters, not just because telecommunication infrastructure is most vulnerable to disasters, but also because reliable telecommunications are a critical underpinning of all other mitigation and relief efforts.

In 2003, before deciding on the continuation of the Swiss support to OCHA's Emergency Telecommunications Project, we asked for an evaluation of this project which includes the management of the IASC Reference Group on Information and Communication as well as the implementation of the Tampere Convention. The evaluation recommended the continuation of the work undertaken by OCHA. However, with regard to the achievements, the evaluation concluded: "At this point in time, it is difficult to maintain that the Tampere Convention has made a significant difference for the humanitarian operations on the ground. Although some success stories do exist, as in the case of the flooding emergency in Mozambique, in other cases attempt to use the treaty to facilitate the provision of emergency telecommunications were highly frustrating." So, in some cases where foreign assistance was badly needed the mounting of a large-scale radio network in the aftermath of disasters proved particularly difficult. It went even so far that telecommunication delegates from humanitarian organisations starting the installation of radio equipment on vehicles on the basis of generic authorisations obtained locally were nearly arrested by the army. Problems in the end were solved, but that was due to negotiations and agreements reached at a local (and even personal) level rather than based on the law.

These problems, and this has to be made very clear, did not come from the Convention itself, but from its non-entry into force and, especially, from the non-adoption of administrative procedures for its implementation on the part of the individual States.

What has not been functioning for relief operations has so far also not been functioning for disaster mitigation, which - in the terms of the Tampere Convention - means "measures designed to prevent, predict, prepare for, respond to, monitor and/or mitigate the impact of disasters". With the coming into force of the treaty, however, the situation should hopefully change. It is undoubtedly a positive coincidence that this entry into force coincides with the adoption of the "Hyogo Framework for Action 2010 – 2015" at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan last month. This Framework, which further strengthens the vital role of mitigation, makes several references to the importance of telecommunications and lists in its annex the Tampere Convention among the important multilateral frameworks of relevance to Disaster Reduction. Rightly so, because, how would one for instance be able to establish a full fledged early warning system without



telecommunications? And the same applies in view of a regional and international cooperation to assess and monitor regional and trans-boundary hazards, and exchange information.

The entry into force of the Tampere Convention does not automatically solve all the problems. The contrary is true. We know that in some countries it is only now that the necessary steps have to be taken to implement the treaty. This might again pose some problems. In some cases the necessary administrative procedure might get stuck as the Convention deals with subjects treated by several Ministries or government agencies. In other cases there might be a lack of the needed information on the importance of the Convention. And finally, in some cases the procedure might simply require a lot of time. Nevertheless, the expectations for the results of the full application of the Tampere Convention are very high, as they are having immediate effect on saving lives.

Therefore, it is recommended, that states remove or reduce regulatory barriers that currently impede the use of telecommunications resources as well as safeguarding of immunities to humanitarian assistance personnel.

States and non State entities are urged to cooperate in deploying terrestrial and satellite equipment

- to predict and monitor hazards and disasters;
- to share information about hazards and disasters;
- and to install and operate reliable and flexible telecommunications; resources for humanitarian relief and assistance organizations.

Our expectation is that the IASC Working Group on Emergency Telecommunication, supported by ITU and OCHA, should:

- a) Continue the improvement of technical standards and of the interagency cooperation in the field of information and communication technology.
- b) Continue the work with the private entities, such as telecommunication firms.
- c) Give guidance and assistance in particular to the most disaster prone countries.
- d) Continue lobbying the member States for the implementation of the Tampere Convention in particular:
 - for the necessary adaptation of national legislation;
 - for monitoring the progress in the field;
 - and for reporting to the emergency telecommunication family.
- e) Last but not least continue lobbying for the ratification and implementation by additional states, because the ratification by 30 states is only the beginning of the process and not a goal in itself.

Switzerland urges the Member States to support the IASC WGET in its efforts. Member States are equally urged to use OCHA's Central Register of Disaster Management Capacities to create and maintain an inventory of human and material resources, to develop a telecommunication action plan indicating how these resources could be deployed and to designate the focal points for such deployments.

We are on a good way. But, there remains a lot which still has to be done so that the people concerned can really benefit from the efforts put in the Tampere Convention so far. Let's do it.

Thank you very much for your attention.