

INFORMATION SESSION ON EMERGENCY TELECOMMUNICATIONS

SPECIAL SESSION, 16 SEPTEMBER 2019

10:00-12:30

WELCOME REMARKS

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ITU partners,
Colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for joining us here today for this session on emergency telecommunications.

How many of you have ever been affected directly or indirectly by a natural disaster?

When Hurricane Sandy hit the Atlantic coast of the United States in 2012, my parents were in their home and despite mandatory evacuation, the deployment of the National Guard, the enforced curfew they refused to leave. It took two weeks to get electricity back. They were lucky as for others it took several more weeks.

Sandy caused \$ 80 billion in damage and 7 years later, the rebuilding continues. The images most familiar to us are from the recent devastation of Hurricane Dorian. Dorian hit the

Bahamas from 1 to 3 September. The slow moving category 5 storm left behind an unprecedented path of destruction. The UN Secretary-General spent the weekend there and said he had never seen this level of systematic devastation. More than 76,000 people are without shelter, food, water, and medical assistance.

In the Abaco and Grand Bahama Islands, most of the mobile telecommunications infrastructure, networks and services, including power lines, were destroyed.

ITU dispatched critical equipment, in coordination with the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster. Iridium and Inmarsat satellite phones and terminals were sent to the country. Our focus is on helping coordination at the government level while the World Food Programme and their partners are focusing on re-establishing critical telecommunication links and satellite internet connectivity. Regrettably, over the weekend Tropical Storm Humberto slowed relief efforts.

We have our colleague Sylvester Cadette on the ground. He is working with the Emergency Telecom Cluster and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA)

Not long ago, in March, massive flooding in the wake of Cyclone Idai caused a humanitarian disaster in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi, killing hundreds of people and displacing thousands in one of Southern Africa's worst weather-related disasters in recent times.

ITU sent satellite phones from Iridium Satellite Communications to Mozambique and to Zimbabwe.

In a few minutes, we will hear more about what happened in Mozambique from Tuaha Mote of ARECOM.

Sadly, the list of disasters caused by natural hazards continues.

Disasters kill at least one million people each decade and leave millions more homeless. Between 2016 and 2017, more than 300 million people around the world were directly affected by disasters.

ITU has been a long-standing advocate for more effective use of technology in disaster relief efforts, and an important player in disaster management.

When established terrestrial communications systems have been affected by disasters, satellite systems can still operate and are a key element of emergency telecommunications strategies.

They play a crucial role by ensuring the timely flow of vital information, allowing for the effective coordination of humanitarian response efforts.

At ITU, we are committed to working around the clock to get the lines of communication open again as quickly as possible. But we would not be able to do this without our partners.

I would like to recognize the outstanding support of our partners from the satellite industry, whose commitment has been essential in allowing us to provide these vital services to disaster-hit areas.

In particular, I would like to mention Iridium, Inmarsat and Thuraya - and I am pleased to see in the room Ethan Lucarelli from Inmarsat.

We are also proud to serve as an active member of the Emergency Telecommunication Cluster (ETC) – led by the World Food Programme.

This is a global network of organizations, industry and public sector members that provides shared communications services in emergency situations. We are committed to aligning our efforts

even more closely with the ETC, and to supporting its important work in any way we can. Jalal Shah will talk to us later about the work of the ETC.

The ITU Global Forum on Emergency Telecommunications, known as GET, held in March, reinforced our cooperation with the ETC. The forum opened the door to more coordination, collaboration and partnerships. We reinforced the principle that all actions and programmes must be people-centered: when disaster strike, it is all about the people.

While our response efforts are importance, preparedness is also essential.

At GET, for the first time at ITU, we held a simulation table-top exercise on a fictitious country hit by a disaster to engage participants in an interactive learning experience for effective preparedness and response.

The simulation took place in the fictitious country of Getonia, impacted by a tsunami.

We had a second simulation exercise during the ITU Global Symposium for Regulators. There we were in the fictitious country of Lovely Islands.

Both simulation exercises emphasized the need for better preparedness on the proper actions that must be taken when disasters hit. They illustrated the potential of technology to save lives and showcased the importance of coordination and cooperation, as well as the critical role of standard operating procedures for disaster response.

The key discussions we have had in the past months on emergency telecommunications led to the signing of the Crisis Connectivity Charter, which took place last week at ITU Telecom World in Budapest.

The signing marked yet another important milestone in ITU's long-standing efforts to bring the power of ICTs to disaster mitigation and humanitarian response.

The Charter is a mechanism created between the satellite industry and the wider humanitarian community to make satellite-based communications more readily available to humanitarians and affected communities in times of disaster.

I would like to thank Pedro Molinero, Coordinator of the Charter, for being here with us today.

To strengthen our work on emergency telecommunications, we will present to you today in the afternoon session, the new ITU emergency telecommunications roster initiative. My colleague in charge of environment and emergency telecommunications, Mijke Hertoghs, will provide you a brief overview of this initiative, which is intended to train ITU staff to deploy telecommunications equipment and support the ETC work on the ground.

The ITU roster needs everyone's support, commitment and involvement. Support from Member States and Sector Members is key, whether in the form of financial contributions to cover deployment costs, donation of equipment or bandwidth and training.

By supporting the work of the ITU emergency telecommunications roster, partners will play a key role in sustaining and strengthening emergency response. The roster will also offer partners an opportunity to highlight their efforts in delivering humanitarian aid.

I would like to conclude my remarks by recalling a conversation I had on disaster preparedness while in Vanuatu.

As I stood by the sea on this beautiful island, I could only imagine the destruction on 13 March 2015, when Cyclone Pam hit, and thousands of buildings were ruined, and some 75,000 people were left homeless.

It was one of the worst disasters ever to hit Vanuatu. More than 160,000 people were estimated to have been affected by the cyclone - more than half of the country's population.

Peter Korisa from the Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office shared with me memories of that day and told me about the importance of the country's new ICT-based disaster-preparedness strategy.

Vanuatu, the country with the highest disaster risk in the world, is an inspiring example for the opportunities of ICTs for disaster risk reduction and management and reducing loss of life.

Thank you for your attention!