

## Easing the way to Disaster Mitigation: The Tampere 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 and that they have serious problems to import and operate telecom equipment. The telecom operators must obtain operating licenses before communicating with the outside world.

The Tampere Convention on the Provision of telecommunication resources for Mitigation and Relief Operations faces such and similar problems. Generally speaking it minimize such impediments.

Switzerland is satisfied, that the Tampere Convention come into force recently. The work related to it has been quite frustrating. It took more than 8 years from the adoption of the Convention.

**Switzerland has always supported strongly the process of the elaboration of the convention:** it financed from the very beginning on the Emergency Telecommunication Unit in OCHA. This unit has acted as the secretariat of the WGET (Working group on Emergency Telecommunications) main body for the promotion of the Tampere Convention.

### **What is the main content of the Convention?**

The **main goal** of the Tampere Convention is to expedite and facilitate the timely and effective provision of emergency telecommunication resources for rapid international humanitarian assistance and efficient information flows in disaster prevention and response.

The Tampere Convention recommends, 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.

Telecommunications assistance can be provided to beneficiaries in a disaster-struck location or in support of disaster prevention/mitigation.

The Tampere Convention **urges** states and non State entities 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.

The convention **foresees** the establishment of **bilateral agreements** between the providers of assistance and the State requesting/receiving such assistance. The provision of telecommunications resources is facilitated between states and between a state and a nonstate entity using the international framework provided by the Convention.

A providing state party sets down in writing the expected fees, if any, and the mod of payment. This framework doesn't preclude the existing or future arrangements between states and between a state and a non State entity in emergency telecommunications assistance. Standard frameworks for such agreements need to be developed to allow the immediate application of the Tampere Convention in any sudden impact disaster.

Finally it's worth noting, that **states**, which have not yet signed or ratified the convention, **may also apply the convention provisionally**. A much bigger number of ratifying countries especially those which are disaster prone and providers of telecom resources are requested to support and implement the spirit of Tampere in the interest of the victims.

### **Swiss expectations**

This is the reason that Switzerland has several expectations towards the IASC WGET

The IASC Working Group on Emergency Telecommunication, supported by OCHA, should from our point of view

- 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 laws
  - for monitoring the progress in the field
  - and for reporting to the emergency telecommunication family

The WGET should, last but not least

e) 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 IASC WGET in its efforts with Workshops, training activities, common exercises and pilot projects which are needed to develop model agreements and best practices in emergency telecommunication provision.

Finally **Switzerland is convinced** that all involved actors should 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 that indicates how these resources could be deployed
- as well to show the focal points to be contacted for such deployments.

**Switzerland is willing to continue the support of the indicated process.** However it is extremely important that other states join this activities actively: not only financially but "with brain and heart".