

## The Tampere Declaration on Disaster Communications

*From May 20-22, 1991, 120 experts in communications and disaster management from more than 25 countries met in Tampere, Finland, for the Conference on Disaster Communications. Mr. Mauri Pekkarinen, Finland's Minister of the Interior, identified some of the aspirations shared by many of the delegates to the Tampere Conference:*

We think that communications offer several possibilities to be used by emergency management systems. Before a disaster strikes it is possible to predict the approaching hazard, to alert the emergency authorities, to raise awareness among the public and to warn the people in a disaster stricken country.

After a disaster has struck it is possible to collect information, to assess damage, to provide leaders of rescue activities means of cooperation for relief and assistance procedures, to transmit news and information to news agencies and representatives of the mass media about ongoing efforts and rescue measures. . . .

[D]isaster work organizations operate rationally only when the communication systems are effective.

*At the conclusion of three days of intensive discussions, the conference participants*

*agreed to The Tampere Declaration on Disaster Communications, addressing the urgent need to coordinate and improve national and international communications capabilities to reduce loss of life and damage to property and the environment as a result of natural and man-made disasters.*

*In the face of massive tragedy caused by recent cyclones and tidal waves in Bangladesh, earthquakes in Iran, and drought and famine in the Sudan, The Tampere Declaration calls for the negotiation of an international Convention on Disaster Communications.*

*According to the Declaration, the Convention should, at a minimum:*

- ◆ *facilitate the widespread and rapid use of terrestrial and satellite communications facilities to predict, monitor, and respond to major disasters throughout the world;*
- ◆ *encourage national authorities to inventory available communications equipment and ensure timely access to these resources;*
- ◆ *provide a mechanism within the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization for international sharing of communications resources, training of personnel, and coordination of disaster relief efforts; and*
- ◆ *minimize regulatory barriers, such as customs clearance procedures and data protection laws, to rapid dissemination of information*

*and effective use of communication resources essential for disaster management.*

*Participants at the Tampere Conference cited dozens of examples where more effective communications could have saved literally thousands of lives that were needlessly lost as a result of natural and man-made disasters.*

*The magnitude and the inadequacy of the current response was poignantly reflected in the May 27, 1991, edition of Time, under the apt title, There Must Be a Better Way:*

*"Improvements in communications and transportation have made the world's disasters no easier to handle. Even with better warning systems, reactions can be snail-paced, ill-considered and futile."*

*Noting that the 1990s have been designated by the United Nations the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, the Tampere Declaration recognized "that disasters have killed millions of people over the past twenty years alone and caused massive financial and other damage to people, property and the environment," and stressed that both "improved flows of international information through telecommunications technologies" and the "critical role of the mass media" must be strengthened to "prevent some of the consequences and reduce the impact of such disasters once they have occurred."*

*Among the dignitaries speaking at the Tampere Conference on Disaster Communications, in addition to Minister Pekkarinen, were Conference Chair Dr. Pekka Tarjanne, Secretary-General of the*

*International Telecommunication Union; Mr. M'Hamed Essaafi, Under Secretary-General of the United Nations and U.N. Disaster Relief Coordinator; and Mr. Par Stenback, Secretary General of the Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.*

*The experts in attendance came from governments, international organizations, private industry, non-profit groups, and universities in Australia, Belgium, China, Colombia, Denmark, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Germany, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Morocco, Pakistan, Poland, Qatar, the Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom, and the United States, among other nations.*

*The Conference on Disaster Communications was sponsored by the International Institute of Communications, Aamuhlet Group Ltd., and The Annenberg Washington Program, with substantial support from the Government of Finland. Additional support for the Tampere Conference was provided by the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization, International Telecommunication Union, United Nations High Commissioners for Refugees, World Medical Organization, World Health Organization, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Finnish Post and Telecommunications, the Center for Public Service Communications, Center for International Environmental Law, and the City of Tampere.*

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## **The Text of the Tampere Declaration**

*22 May 1991, Tampere, Finland*

### **Purpose**

- 1.** The group of experts in communications and disaster management participating in the Conference on Disaster Communications held at Tampere, Finland, from 20-22 May 1991, declare that there is an urgent need to improve international co-operation in communications and enhance national communications capabilities in order to reduce loss of life, damage to property and livelihoods, and damage to the environment caused by disasters. For the purpose of this Declaration disasters are viewed as extreme occurrences which outstrip the ability of an affected society to cope with them. Behind these events often lie chronic problems stemming from the interaction of natural, environmental and man-made factors. In this regard the Tampere Conference welcomes the proposal for a Pilot UN Centre for Urgent Environmental Assistance (Agenda Item No. 4) to be considered at the 16th Governing Council Session of the UN Environment Programme, Nairobi, 20 to 31 May 1991.
- 2.** The Tampere Conference reiterates the primary responsibility of national authorities for disaster management and communications. The supportive role of international organizations in disaster management is highlighted. The Conference also recognizes the important role played by indigenous and international non-governmental organizations in disaster mitigation and relief.
- 3.** The Tampere Conference recognizes that disasters have killed millions of people over the past twenty years alone and caused massive financial and other damage to people, property and the environment. Such disasters will continue to occur frequently around the globe, with particularly devastating consequences in the developing countries. Further efforts are required to prevent such disasters and alleviate their consequences.
- 4.** The Tampere Conference stresses that improved flows of international information through telecommunication technologies, including satellite and broadcasting, can assist in the prediction, monitoring and early warning necessary to prevent some of the consequences and reduce the impact of such disasters once they have occurred. There is an urgent need to improve the nature, scope and quality of information being transmitted internationally, including its validity, significance, accuracy and timeliness.
- 5.** The critical role of the mass media in providing public information services to communities at risk is recognized, as is their broader role in education and opinion-forming, particularly with regard to slow-onset disasters.
- 6.** Terrestrial and satellite communications, including established international satellite networks, and remote-sensing technologies have played, and will continue to play, major roles in reducing the devastating effects of disasters by dramatically improving hazard identification and risk assessment, disaster preparedness, monitoring, early warning and

onset and post-disaster relief operations. These facilities are, in practice, not universally accessible, particularly in developing countries where such disasters most frequently occur.

**7.** Communication links are almost always disabled and disrupted during the first hours of a major disaster. When disaster strikes, there is an urgency to establish effective and comprehensive communication links at the disaster site, between the site and the national systems for dealing with disaster response, and with the concerned international community.

**8.** The Tampere Conference endorses the Preamble and Major Needs identified and the Recommendations adopted at the UNDR0 International Conference on Disaster Communications on 21 March 1990 and held in the context of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR).

**9.** The Tampere Conference calls for the development of a convention on Disaster Communications as elaborated further below and to be negotiated not later than 1993. This Convention should be viewed in the context of a future comprehensive accord on disaster management.

**10.** The Tampere Conference recognizes the urgent communications needs generated by emergency disaster relief and the longer-term needs of disaster mitigation.

#### **Communications in Disaster Relief**

**11.** Present limitations to disaster communications include:

(a) organizational barriers which impede the flow of information among the various elements of the international disaster response network.

(b) uncertainty over the availability and location of communications equipment which could be made accessible for disaster use.

(c) regulatory barriers which slow down the importation and operation of communications equipment.

(d) high costs which inhibit the effective use of communications equipment during disasters.

**12.** In order to overcome these barriers a convention on Disaster Communications should, at a minimum:

(a) establish an effective framework for co-operation between and among State parties, intergovernmental and regional groupings and entities, and non-governmental bodies, including international terrestrial and satellite telecommunications operating organizations and relevant commercial sector organizations.

(b) further improve the co-ordination of international disaster management.

(c) ensure the utilization to the maximum extent of existing global, regional and

national terrestrial and satellite communications networks; encourage the immediate availability at national, regional and international centres of communications equipment; and encourage the development of the amateur radio services and their application to disaster communications.

(d) encourage national authorities to establish an inventory and/or data base of their own communications equipment and resources relevant to disaster relief, national regulations to ensure access to them, and an appropriate national preparedness plan for their effective use.

(e) encourage UNDRO, within the framework of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, to maintain an international inventory of communications equipment and resources and to invite national governments, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and other relevant entities to make their own communications equipment and resources information available.

(f) encourage improved and enhanced national and international training programmes to develop the necessary expertise in the rapidly-evolving field of disaster communications, and the further consideration of the communications issue in disaster management training programmes.

(g) facilitate the rapid dissemination and effective use of communications equipment and resources by limiting, reducing and, where possible, removing regulatory barriers, including:

- ◆ Customs clearance procedures and duties.
- ◆ Restrictions on possession and use.
- ◆ Inappropriate restrictions on the dissemination of existing and new technical information.
- ◆ The need for type-approval procedures and operating licences, including simplification.
- ◆ National rules concerning the temporary assignment of appropriate radio frequencies.

(h) establish appropriate further rules relating to matters as:

- ◆ Entry, exit and transit for personnel, equipment and property.
- ◆ Direction and control of assistance.
- ◆ Confidentiality of information.
- ◆ Privileges, immunities and facilities.
- ◆ Claims and compensation.

(i) establish the basis for an appropriate tariff structure for domestic and international communications carriers, including waiver of charges where appropriate, and the necessary philosophy and approach to payment for communications services required in disaster relief efforts.

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## Communications in Disaster Mitigation

- 13.** Effective early warning systems and comprehensive data bases are limited by the unequal access to communications technology, software and expertise.
- 14.** The proposed Convention should, at a minimum, establish mechanisms for international co-operation in the use of terrestrial and satellite telecommunications technologies in the prediction, monitoring and early warning of disasters, especially the early dissemination of information to those in the at-risk communities.

## The Way Forward

- 15.** The Tampere Conference recommends that no later than 1993 an intergovernmental conference be convened under the auspices of UNDR0 to prepare for the negotiation of an International Convention on Disaster Communications to establish appropriate mechanisms to improve international co-operation. This conference should be complementary to envisaged intergovernmental action to facilitate the use of communications equipment for disaster relief and to the global meeting of IDNDR National Committees proposed for 1993.
- 16.** To carry through the above suggestions—the enhancement and improvement of disaster communication—will require a realistic financial commitment from the international community, including governments, international organizations, donor organizations, non-governmental organizations and the private sector.
- 17.** The proposed Convention should take account of existing provisions and proposals, including Resolution No. 209 (Mob-87) of the World Administrative Radio Conference for the Mobile Services, Geneva, 1987, on the Study and Implementation of a Global Land and Maritime Distress and Safety System.
- 18.** The development of the proposed Convention on Disaster Communication should be coordinated by UNDR0, in co-operation with the ITU and other relevant organizations, including international terrestrial and satellite telecommunications operating organizations.
- 19.** Recognizing that the development of such a Convention will take time, the Tampere Conference calls upon all States to consider urgent measures to give effect to the provisions of this Declaration on an interim unilateral or bilateral basis for general humanitarian reasons.
- 20.** The Tampere Conference recommends that, consistent with the goals and objectives of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, the UN Disaster Relief Co-ordinator should take the appropriate steps to implement the intent of this Declaration with the support of, and in consultation with, other concerned bodies of the UN system, international terrestrial and satellite telecommunications operating organizations and non-governmental organizations.

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**21.** The Tampere Conference recommends that this Declaration be circulated to governments, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations, and in appropriate international fora, such as the November 1991 International Red Cross Conference and the June 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, and be considered in the relevant activities of concerned organizations and institutions at the international, regional and national levels.

**22.** The Tampere Conference expresses its gratitude to the Government of Finland and the City of Tampere for hosting the Conference; to the International Institute of Communications for convening it; to the Aamuhletti Group Ltd. and The Annenberg Washington Program in Communications Policy Studies of Northwestern University for their support; to UNDRO, the ITU, UNHCR, WMO, WHO and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies for their support; to the Finnish Post and Telecommunications, the Center for Public Service Communications, and the Centre for International Environmental Law for their assistance; and to all those present for their participation.