



# Global Symposium+5

Information for Humanitarian Action



Bringing together a community of practice on humanitarian information and knowledge

## FINAL REPORT

HIN Panama 2005

HIN Africa 2006

# Information Exchange

2003

Humanitarian Information Network

Cooperating on Best Practices

Humanitarian Information Management

Exchange

Symposium on Best Practices

Humanitarian Information Exchange



UNITED NATIONS

# 200

"...Information is very directly about saving lives. If we take the wrong decisions, make the wrong choices about where we put our money and our effort because our knowledge is poor, we are condemning some of the most deserving to death or destitution".

**– John Holmes**

UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and  
Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs

# Global Symposium +5

on Information for Humanitarian Action

## FINAL REPORT

22 - 26 October 2007  
Palais des Nations, Geneva



UNITED NATIONS  
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# Abbreviations

AAAS	American Association for the Advancement of Science
ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency International
ADRC	Asian Disaster Reduction Center
AIMB	Advocacy and Information Management Branch
AIMS	Afghanistan Information Management Service
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CAP	Consolidated Appeals Process
CEPREDENAC	Centro de Coordinación para la Prevención de los Desastres Naturales en América Central
CERF	Central Emergency Response Fund
CHCS	Common Humanitarian Classification System
CISA/IPNC	Certified Information Systems Auditor / IP Network Convergence
CNBC	Consumer News and Business Channel
CNN	Cable News Network
CRED	Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters
DEPHA	Data Exchange Platform for the Horn of Africa
DFID	Department for International Development
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ECHO	Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FAS	FAS Femmes Africa Solidarité
FAST	Field Assessment Summary Template
FEWS	Famine Early Warning System
FIS	Field Information Services

FOLDOC	Free On-Line Dictionary of Computing
FTS	Financial Tracking System
GHD	Good Humanitarian Donorship
GIS	Geographic Information Systems
GIST	Geographic Information Support Team
GLIDE	Global Identifier
GPS	Global Positioning System
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HCIC	Humanitarian Community Information Centre
HIC	Humanitarian Information Centre
HIN	Humanitarian Information Network
HNTS	Health and Nutrition Tracking Service
HURIDOCs	Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IASCI	International Agency for Source Country Information
ICRAC-CIRAC	International Committee for the Respect of the African Charter
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
IDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IECAH	Institute of Studies on Conflicts and Humanitarian Action
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IM	Information Management
iMAP	Information Management and Mine Action Programs
INGC	Mozambique National Institute for Disaster Management
InSTEDD	International System for Total Early Disease Detection
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPC	Integrated Food Security and Humanitarian Phase Classification
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Networks

ISCRAM	Information Systems for Crisis Response and Management
ISDR	International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
IT	Information Technology
ITHACA	Information Technology for Humanitarian Assistance, Cooperation and Action
ITOS	Information Technology Outreach Services (University of Georgia)
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
KFOR	Kosovo International Security Force
MARWOPNET	Mano River Women's Peace Network
MERCOSUR	Mercado Común del Sur (Southern Common Market)
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OASIS	Operational Activity Security Information System
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OFDA	Office for Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID)
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PAHO	Pan American Health Organization
P-Code	Place code
PDA	Personal Digital Assistant
PDC	Pacific Disaster Center
RAPID	Rapid Assessments using Proxy Indicators
Risk RED	Risk Reduction Education for Disasters
RC	Resident Coordinator
RSS	Really Simple Syndication
RTLM Radio	Radio-Télévision Libre des Mille Collines
RVA	Rapid Village Assessment
SADC	Southern African Development Community

SHARE	Structured Humanitarian Assistance Reporting
SLIS	Sierra Leone Information Service
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SOPAC	Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission
SUMA	Humanitarian Supply Management System
UN	United Nations
UNAMI	United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
UNDAC	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNGIWG	United Nations Geographic Information Working Group
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
UNJLC	United Nations Joint Logistics Center
UNMIS	United Nations Mission in Sudan
UNOCI	United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNOSAT	United Nations Operational Satellite Applications Programme
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UNSDI	United Nations Spatial Data Infrastructure
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USIP	United States Institute of Peace
VOA	Voice of America
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

# Foreword



**I am pleased to present to you the final report of the **Global Symposium +5 on Information for Humanitarian Action**, which was convened in Geneva in October 2007. This report brings together the proceedings, deliberations and conclusions.**

In the five years since the first symposium – the Symposium on Best Practices in Humanitarian Information Exchange – there have been numerous advances in the field of humanitarian information. This has taken place within the context of a sustained effort to improve the humanitarian system through the reform agenda, aimed at more predictable funding and strengthened leadership.

The past five years have also brought some of the largest and most complex humanitarian crises on record: the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004; the Pakistan earthquake in 2005; and the persistence of the conflict in Darfur. And the demands for humanitarian relief are likely to increase: 2007 saw more climate-related natural disasters than in any previous year.

Now more than ever, the humanitarian community must base its interventions on objective, reliable and timely information. Although information has always been a key element in humanitarian action, it is now rightly recognized as the essential foundation for sound decision-making, informed advocacy and needs-based resource allocation.

These principles and others have been captured in the following report and represent the views and experience of more than 300 participants. The Symposium Statement sets out a common vision for the central role of information in support of humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery. And the Symposium recommendations cover a wide range of activities, from the development of a humanitarian classification system based on common indicators to the establishment of mechanisms to govern activities within the information sector.

OCHA, in consultation with its partners, will develop an action plan in the first half of 2008 which will lay out a road map for implementation of the recommendations in the immediate future and over the longer term. As we take this ambitious agenda forward, I count on your continued support and partnership.

In convening events such as these, we aim to raise the profile and importance of effective information management in support of humanitarian action. Good information and analysis – and the ability to communicate both effectively – are central to everything we do, and central above all to doing it better. Simply put, information well used can save lives.

**John Holmes**

UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and  
Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs



# Executive Summary

**W**ith the ever-changing humanitarian landscape, challenges and opportunities continue to characterize the humanitarian community's ability to share, manage and exchange information. While timely, relevant and reliable information remains central to effective humanitarian coordination and response, users increasingly expect information to support evidence-based advocacy, decision-making and resource allocation. Given these expectations, information professionals recognize they must work together to produce information tailored to serve a range of different needs in affected countries based on common standards and sound analytical methods. Today's technology offers many solutions but real progress is still only possible through the willingness of people and their organizations to collaborate in sharing, managing and communicating information as a community.

It was in this context that the 2007 **Global Symposium +5 on Information for Humanitarian Action** was held in Geneva at the Palais des Nations on 22-26 October. The Symposium brought together more than 300 humanitarian professionals to build upon a community of practice on humanitarian information and knowledge to strengthen humanitarian response through timely and reliable information. Participation represented the broad spectrum of humanitarian actors globally. This report reflects the collective wisdom and learning of this wide base of humanitarian information professionals representing more than 100 organizations. The report outlines emerging themes, recognizes lessons and good practice, and reaffirms the agreed principles supporting quality standards. Most importantly, it provides recommendations that will guide the humanitarian community forward.

This community of practice on information and knowledge came into life five years earlier at the 2002 Symposium on Best Practices in Humanitarian Information Exchange<sup>1</sup>, also held in Geneva. This first gathering on

humanitarian information agreed upon a Statement and endorsed 10 humanitarian information principles. It also spurred the creation of the Humanitarian Information Network (HIN), which through its regional workshops promoted best practices in information and developed regional communities of practice in Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and sub-Saharan Africa<sup>2</sup>. The 2007 Symposium was an opportunity to follow up on the outcomes of the 2002 Symposium and to review the principles and best practices developed since then.

Participants had five days to examine the challenges for gearing information towards humanitarian action and to propose improvements. Eight key themes emerged: strategic use of information and analysis; communications with affected communities; standards; collaboration and partnerships; preparedness; professionalization; technology and innovation, and capacity-building. The themes, with their associated outcomes - best practices, lessons learned and recommendations - are described in Section 2.

The impact of the Global Symposium +5 will be monitored and analyzed by a team of academics from United States-based **Penn State University College of Information Sciences and Technology** in a two year study. The 2008-09 study follows their initial impact survey of the 2002 Symposium and a survey taken during Symposium +5 and it will focus on the event's influence on information-sharing patterns, the ongoing development of participants' skills and knowledge, and the evolution of social networks formed during the event. The findings of this study will inform future Symposium-related events.

Alongside these outcomes, participants endorsed a Statement as "a common vision of the central role of information in support of effective humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery". The Statement committed those present to sharing the agreed text and outcomes with their respective organizations, advocating

1. For more information: [http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/2002\\_symposium](http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/2002_symposium)

2. These workshops were held respectively in Bangkok (2003), Panama (2005) and Nairobi (2006). For more information: <http://www.reliefweb.int/hin/about.html>

broadly on “information for humanitarian action”, and mandating OCHA, in consultation with other relevant bodies, to develop an action plan for the implementation of the recommendations. The Statement recognized information management as a horizontal function to be mainstreamed into cluster work plans as part of the Humanitarian Reform process and proposed that this be conducted through an inter-agency mechanism. The Statement, including its commitments and principles, forms Section 3 of this report.

Of the 30 recommendations put forward by the Symposium the need for improved methods for assessments and humanitarian classification was seen as a priority. Information management should be driven by analysis required for decision-making and the operational needs of the decision makers. The development of improved assessment methods to support global, regional, national and local decision-making along with developing the concept of a common humanitarian classification system are two recommended initiatives. Other key recommendations were to establish a community-wide knowledge base and to strengthen humanitarian information management by creating a professional category supported by an association and curricula developed within academic settings.

Communications with affected communities remains a critically neglected area of humanitarian response. It was first highlighted five years ago and yet there has been little improvement in how the humanitarian community provides information during a disaster<sup>3</sup>. The power of dialogue between humanitarian actors and affected communities to support, enhance and make more effective and accountable all aspects of risk reduction, humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery is poorly understood by the humanitarian community. Integrating two-way communications with affected communities into standard operating procedures for emergency preparedness and response will be a first step in addressing this issue.

In compiling the report of Symposium +5, the editorial team recognized that its contents were produced from the dedication, innovation and inspiration of more than 500 professionals within the humanitarian community who have attended Symposium-related events since 2002 and are part of a Humanitarian Information Network. The team

hopes that the report will not only provide a benchmark for progress in information for humanitarian action, but will also act as a reference document for strengthening humanitarian information training and expanding partnership networks. Its most ambitious goal would be to ensure that knowledge generated in 2007 is not only shared widely in the coming years but becomes common practice.

The Symposium’s biggest accomplishment remains the forging of a community of practice in humanitarian information that will continue to develop and evolve in future years. ReliefWeb and other partners will continue to promote the best practices of this community by promoting collaboration, dialogue, and cooperation, as well as fostering new partnerships between the humanitarian community, the academic and the private sectors.

3. World Disasters Report 2005, International Federation of Red Cross; ‘The Right to Know’, Office of the UN Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery (OSE), 2006; Building media capacities to improve disaster response: lessons from Pakistan, Internews, Humanitarian Practice Network.

# 1 Introduction

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# Introduction

**T**he Global Symposium +5 on Information for Humanitarian Action was held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland, October 22 – 26, 2007. Convened by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the event was organized by the ReliefWeb and Field Information Services projects and sponsored by the Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission (ECHO) as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen humanitarian information community wide in support of humanitarian action.

## Background

The Global Symposium +5 was the successor event to the 2002 Symposium on Best Practices in Humanitarian Information Exchange, the first-ever worldwide gathering dedicated to the subject of humanitarian information management. Subsequent workshops of the community of practice to emerge, known as the Humanitarian Information Network (HIN), were held in Bangkok in September 2003, in Panama in August 2005 and in Nairobi in May 2006. The workshops provided an opportunity to consider the applicability of the Symposium's best practices, principles and recommendations at regional and national levels in Asia-Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and sub-Saharan Africa.

Following the Nairobi recommendations to institutionalize key approaches to managing information in the reform environment and a subsequent global workshop in Geneva, 10 recommendations for integrating information management across the clusters were endorsed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. In view of these events and in order to follow up on the 2002 and HIN workshop recommendations, the concept<sup>4</sup> for a Global Symposium +5 was formed.

During this planning period of the Symposium Steering Committee, academics from United-States-based Penn State University, College of Information Sciences and

Technology undertook an evaluation of the outcomes of the 2002 Symposium and HIN workshop events (see box 1). Findings from Penn State's surveys and interviews, alongside consultations with UN and NGO information specialists, independent experts, international standards authorities and UN Member States further helped to underpin the conceptual development of the Symposium +5 programme.

### Penn State survey findings:

1. The 2002 Symposium developed relationships and professionalization of Information Management in the humanitarian sector;
2. The principles and best practices from the Statement were widely and diversely used;
3. Follow-up actions in the Final Report were unclear and unfinished; and
4. Frequent employment changes in the humanitarian sector, particularly IM, make it difficult to coordinate communications.

### Recommendations included:

1. Create a mechanism for post-Symposium interaction across organizations;
2. Disseminate principles and best practices to as wide an audience as possible;
3. Incorporate follow-up actions into dissemination, communication and post-Symposium activities;
4. A mechanism should be created to maintain up-to-date contact information of all participants.

## Purpose and Objective

The purpose of the Global Symposium +5 was to bring together a community of practice on humanitarian information and knowledge. The objective was to review changes in the humanitarian environment over the last five years and produce a collective statement of

4. The Concept Paper is available at: <http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/docs/Conceptpaperweb.doc>

principles and best practices, lessons learned, as well as make recommendations for consideration by appropriate agencies and authorities to implement in the coming years. The Symposium was also an opportunity to widen the term “information management” to a broader cross section of the humanitarian community. The concept of IM has evolved since the first Symposium in 2002 when “the field of humanitarian information had come of age”<sup>5</sup> and the issues discussed were mostly technical. But information management can no longer be regarded as the sole domain of technical staff, as the role of information and how it is used is now recognized as central to everyone’s work.

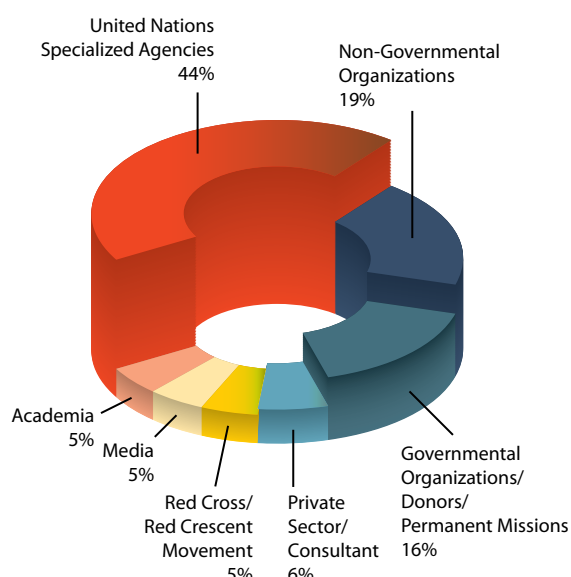
## Participation

More than 300 participants and observers attended the Global Symposium +5 (See Annex F), comprising representatives from UN agencies, international and non-governmental organizations, national governments – including donors and those affected by humanitarian emergencies – members of scientific and research communities, media and the private sector (See Figure 1). These included professionals from field locations and headquarters, as well as professionals from technical, managerial and decision-making levels. Profiles of

participants ranged from information managers and GIS specialists; to desk officers, cluster-lead and partner representatives and humanitarian coordinators; to advocacy and public information officers, journalists; and government and donor officials, as well as private sector emergency response personnel and executives. Participants were selected by their level of experience in humanitarian information, organizational background and geographic representiveness. Consideration was also given to gender balance and proximity to humanitarian operations or headquarters. Selection was intended to embrace and extend HIN membership. Representatives of initiatives with objectives similar to the Symposium were also invited, including ICT4Peace Foundation<sup>6</sup>, Information Systems for Crisis Response and Management (ISCRAM)<sup>7</sup>, and Web4Dev<sup>8</sup>.

For those unable to attend the event, blogs<sup>9</sup> debated key issues beyond the conference hall and webcasts<sup>10</sup> streamed sessions for online viewers. The Symposium website<sup>11</sup> was updated regularly throughout the event, with text, visuals and audio. Broadcast and print media also covered the event. Cross-fertilization between these media enriched the discussions, enabling contributions from non-participants. For more information on the structure of the Symposium and its proceedings, please refer to Annex A.

**Figure 1: Participants**



6. For more information: <http://www.ict4peace.org>

7. For more information: <http://www.iscrum.org>

8. For more information: <http://www.un.org/events/web4dev/>

9. For more information: [http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/12\\_bloggers/index.html](http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/12_bloggers/index.html)

10. For more information: [http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/10\\_webcast/webcast1.html](http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/10_webcast/webcast1.html)

11. For more information: <http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium>

5. Ed Tsui, Director, 2002 Symposium Final Report Foreword, p3.



## 2 Key Themes, Lessons Learned/Best Practices and Recommendations





# Key Themes, Lessons Learned/Best Practices and Recommendations

**O**ver the course of the five-day Symposium, the following eight themes emerged during working groups, plenary panels and keynote addresses:

- 1) strategic use of information and analysis,
- 2) standards,
- 3) collaboration and partnerships,
- 4) communications with affected communities,
- 5) preparedness,
- 6) professionalization of humanitarian information management,
- 7) technology/innovation,
- 8) capacity-building.

Each working group identified humanitarian information management lessons learned and best practices and made recommendations that have been grouped under the eight themes. Lessons learned, best practices, and recommendations addressed during plenary sessions have also been incorporated.

## Strategic use of Information and Analysis

Participants' discussions considered challenges inherent in joining up practical information management processes with analytical processes to strengthen the strategic value of information to end-users. Key findings relate to known best practice around defining in advance the purposes of information end products, the needs and interests of decision makers and/or target audiences, and on this basis, designing the most appropriate analytical methodologies and identifying compatible data and information collection processes to build a sound evidence base. Further, information products must be presented in usable and understandable formats from the end-user perspective, conveying clearly the critical information upon which to base decisions.

It was emphasized that evidence-based analysis offers a much sounder basis upon which to mobilize and allocate resources; to improve operational effectiveness and programme efficiency; and to evaluate the impact of humanitarian preparedness and response. It was noted that a sound evidence base can also be strategically leveraged in producing public information for humanitarian advocacy and raising awareness to galvanize political will and humanitarian action.

The Symposium highlighted recent humanitarian information initiatives, including tools, products and services, which were identified as good practice in the



**"C**oordination is not sharing of information. It is getting actors to agree on taking action on the information that is shared and decide on a division of labour."

– **Bo Asplund**

UN Deputy Special Representative  
for Afghanistan



provision of critical information and analysis for decision makers. It was acknowledged that action-oriented information, when successfully integrated into an organization's decision support and analytical processes, supports faster, more effective delivery of assistance and can potentially save lives, reduce suffering and economic losses, as well as accelerate recovery and reconstruction processes.

While good IM practices were reviewed, it was also noted that caution and care be exercised within an environment where there is a proliferation of new technologies, new media and new actors and sources in new emergencies. If well managed and integrated, a resulting "information tsunami" can occur whereby critically needed data, information and knowledge can get lost in the overload. Information professionals can attempt to address these challenges by remaining clear on the strategic and operational information needs of humanitarian officials, identifying knowledge gaps and ensuring good practice in the extraction, synthesis and presentation of critical and usable information. Preparedness, as noted later, was also identified as a key indicator of success in meeting such challenges and that field testing new technologies, including new media, is something to be done in advance of implementing in new emergencies rather than during the event.

## Lessons Learned and Best Practices

- Humanitarian information products, services and tools should be designed and developed based on identified user needs and decision-making requirements, and should support analytical processes. Further, they should be easy to use, access and retrieve, and presented in formats that highlight the strategic relevance of the information.
- Humanitarian information products, services and tools should be periodically evaluated and their users surveyed in order to examine their use, practicality, and effectiveness and to make user-centred adaptations and modifications.
- Reduction of duplication and overload, improvement in effectiveness and efficiency, and faster and better informed decisions are qualitative criteria and metrics that can be used to evaluate the value of information



**"T**he challenge is to match traditional knowledge and information mechanisms with formal systems. How can satellite systems work with traditional information mechanisms such as drums and flags?"

– Paulo Zucula

Director of Mozambique's Disasters Management Institute

projects, services, products and systems.

- Credibility of the source is extremely important in the strategic use of external information and decision makers tend to use analysis from their own organizations or from a selection of trusted sources.
- Evidence-based decisions require information on needs, capacities, and resources and must be balanced against media and political pressure that can influence resource allocation.

## Recommendations

- **Assessment methods**  
Develop improved methods for assessments and humanitarian classification at all levels, with the goal of reaching a higher degree of comparability over time and space and incorporating these methods into decision-making processes at global, regional, national and local levels. Assessment methods and initiatives should be reviewed to reach technical consensus on methodologies, thresholds and definitions. Accelerate the development of a phased assessment process comprising techniques such as rapid proxy indicator assessments and multi-cluster assessments.
- **Funding of assessments**  
Stand-alone independent and multi-sectoral needs assessments with a broad scope on the overall humanitarian situation should be considered for financing by donors.
- **Common Situation Analysis**  
Develop a Common Situation Analysis template

in consultation with stakeholders and taking into account existing tools for application in forthcoming emergencies to provide key evidence-based information to decision makers to further humanitarian action, performance benchmarking and accountability.

#### ■ **Common Humanitarian Classification System (CHCS)**

Develop the concept of a common, multi-sectoral humanitarian classification system, building upon the Integrated Food Security and Humanitarian Phase Classification Scheme (IPC), but explicitly including analysis of other humanitarian sectors and indicators. The CHCS would form a platform where different information systems and assessments are linked together and analyzed with the aim to inform decision makers on the degree of severity of crises.

#### ■ **Financial Tracking**

Build on existing financial tracking mechanisms and institutional strategies in order to mobilize resources for humanitarian action, enhance coordination and avoid duplication, and identify gaps in funding and assistance. Establish shared platforms to improve and structure coordination on resource mobilization, including information-sharing on resources which exist and how to channel them.

## Standards

Standards and standardization was a recurring theme among participants and tended to be interpreted broadly, depending on their perspectives. Interpretations included everything from concepts of standards being the principles that should be agreed upon to define quality and best practice in humanitarian information to the technical IM prerequisites that should be agreed upon, such as common classification systems, terminology and metadata—which would support compatibility, comparability and interoperability of information and data.

Agreement around standards was seen as a prerequisite to managing information across sectors or clusters as a community to support the production of analysis and information that is strategically helpful to decision makers, including cluster leads and the HC, among others. Further, participants specified that developing a common terminology and adopting standard measurement indicators, as well as common or interoperable assessment formats with minimal standard indicators, would greatly facilitate interoperability and the sharing and use of information among different organizations and actors. While it was acknowledged that different assessment methodologies and techniques were difficult to standardize given the myriad of actors, it was agreed that assessments should be shared and made available at a minimum and be documented for use and evaluation by others. Geographic Information System (GIS) application to standardized data and information further enhances the capacity to perform comparative statistical analysis.

The Symposium tackled the often contentious issue of standards and standardization with participants highlighting the need to build upon existing, preferably open standards, indicators, guidelines and principles in their work. Two approaches to standards development were examined and considered for a way forward, including: 1) the top-down approach, whereby standards are developed at the global level in the humanitarian community to ensure support for adoption and promulgation at decision-making levels and thereby the integration and widest adoption and use of standards throughout the system; or 2) the bottom-up approach which comprises organically evolving standards based on grass-roots adoption, value and suitability for local needs. A midway combination of the two was the suggested third and preferred approach with the development of



**"M**ozambique's cluster approach had 14 partners working together but using different templates, different formats, different mechanisms of information gathering, and even different analysis and follow-up from the same assessment. Standardized templates and tools would be very welcomed."

– **Leila Pakkala**

UNICEF Representative, Mozambique



**"T**he key is to develop a common language encompassing technology and humanitarian response, the standards we are looking for, and we have a long way to go."

– **Jemilah Mahmood**  
President, MERCY Malaysia

standards being stewarded at the global level and field colleagues actively engaged in standards development that have been field-tested and recognized as good practice that has proven functional in the operational environment.

While the adoption of information principles, guidelines and best practices is voluntary and cannot be enforced, it was acknowledged that increased awareness and use of existing standards strengthen capacity to deliver higher quality information products and services, as well as to exchange and manage information across the community and to work together more effectively. Nevertheless, acknowledgement at the working level was not seen to be enough from the participants' view to truly move forward – hence a strong call for leadership and understanding of the importance of standards at the senior and principals' levels was seen as critical for the effective promulgation and adoption of standards. More needed to be done through either the IASC or other consortia, to endorse and promote standards, guidelines and best practices, and to help reconcile ambiguities, contradictions, and divergent principles and practices.

## Lessons Learned and Best Practices

- Most standards and best practices used by the humanitarian community have emerged from de facto processes – established due to dominance of a prevailing system, default usage, or an informal consensus by key actors. These de facto standards need to be recognized and integrated into each organization's standard operating procedures and guiding principles.

- Use of a common, agreed-upon geo-referencing system standard (e.g., decimal latitude/longitude, P-Code schema, authoritative gazetteer of place names, ISO abbreviations) facilitates the exchange and use of information from different sources. Geospatial data that uses the same geo-referencing standard can be easily shared and used for GIS applications.
- Promote the use of Open Standards to further improve interoperability of data and services among the humanitarian community.
- While English is a standard language for the international humanitarian community, operational information should be kept simple and should be combined with data tables and visualizations whenever possible. Information for national authorities, civil society organizations and affected populations should be in local languages.

## Recommendations

- **Global minimum standards**  
As members of the community of practice on humanitarian information, participants recognized the revised Principles (see Section 3) for their value and guidance in their work. Similarly, existing humanitarian and information forums, including the IASC, were recognized as platforms through which new indicators and standards should be developed or existing ones streamlined. The IASC should take a lead role in development and enforcement of global minimum IM standards. A chapter on IM and standards should be added to the Sphere Handbook<sup>12</sup>.
- **Standardized terminology**  
Update and disseminate existing international standards terminology related to humanitarian IM in order to strengthen credibility of information and analysis of needs, including through the creation of an international thesaurus on humanitarian terminology. Examples of such terminology include ISO, Sphere, the Protection Information Systems Taxonomy, and the International Thesaurus of Refugee Terminology, among others.

12. Sphere Project – Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response. The Sphere Project. 2004.

### ■ **Field Assessment Summary Template (FAST)**

Develop a one-page FAST to be completed for each field assessment by collaborating UN, NGO, government and/or academic organizations. The FAST should be a simple and brief format to describe the assessment's methodology, key findings and detailed (geo-referenced) location of assessed areas. This will address OCHA's role of managing a survey of surveys, in an effort to reduce duplication and over-assessment.

## Collaboration and Partnerships

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The goal of the Symposium was to bring together a community of practice on humanitarian information and knowledge through its participants, representing the broad spectrum of humanitarian actors globally. Participants were encouraged to network, make contacts and foster new relationships in the belief that collaboration builds trust and commitment, promotes cross-fertilization of perspectives and methods, and encourages the adoption of de facto standards and best practices. The hope was also expressed that collaboration and partnerships might have synergistic effects in all aspects and phases of the humanitarian continuum with respect to improving the provision and sharing of high quality humanitarian information.

While many new relationships were established, many long-time colleagues were also reunited and shared their latest experiences and practice while reflecting together on the changing humanitarian environment and its implications. Information was recognized as an area of common interest in working together and managing information was seen as a common functional requirement across the humanitarian community. The relatively new cluster-based coordination environment was considered to offer new opportunities and challenges for strengthening information exchange partnerships since collaborative information management approaches had the potential to support the broader humanitarian community's efforts to work together better.

Many challenges exist in building and maintaining communities of practice, not the least of which is the evolving and changing number of actors globally who must interact and work together in so many different operational environments. The humanitarian community and the information professionals within that community tend to move between agencies and emergencies, making it a big challenge to maintain working relationships and regular contact. Practical ideas to maintain working relationships included collaborating on projects that offered mutual support and benefit and establishing linkages to avoid duplication and stove piped information. Latest technology ideas also were seen as having significant potential to support communities of practice, including both the latest social networking software, such as Facebook, to using the latest collaboration



**“**It's about leveraging information. Information is already out there. My central challenge is getting the information into ways in which it can be really sustainable and useful in a timely manner for, say, human rights advocacy or for saving lives.”

– **Sanjana Yajitha Hattotuwa**  
Senior Advisor, ICT4Peace Foundation

software such as Google Groups or Microsoft Groove for working together on projects. Private sector technology participants were keen to be supportive in the development of these technologies and ideas.

## Lessons Learned and Best Practices

- Partnering with the media can be an effective way of communicating information to the affected population, especially using local and international media outlets to inform the local population about humanitarian relief operations.
- Consider the efficiencies of outsourcing technical functions to the private sector, especially local private interests when cost-effective and appropriate. Encourage a constructive role for the private sector and academia by incorporating their expertise into preparedness and planning activities.
- Virtual collaboration and geographically dispersed partnerships require proactive stewardship, informal social networks and periodic face-to-face interaction in order to be effective and successful.
- Peer review, sharing assessments and evaluations among humanitarian actors in-country can foster better-informed funding decisions. Civil-military collaboration on assessments can be very effective and provides timely information.

## Recommendations

- **Joint projects, assessments and evaluations**  
Promote multi-agency partnerships and participation in needs assessments, multi-sectoral evaluations and humanitarian common services projects.
- **Cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral dialogue**  
Promote dialogue, cooperation and collaboration among scientific and academic communities, the private sector and humanitarian practitioners working in information management. Conferences, symposiums, training workshops and exercises, and other events should be encouraged to include participation from the multiple sub-communities and sectors.
- **Emergency services**  
Promote cooperation among humanitarian organizations and emergency service organizations working in IM to identify best practices from other disciplines and explore how their knowledge could be shared and, where feasible, integrated.
- **Humanitarian and media**  
Promote collaboration among humanitarian and media development communities, in collaboration with national heads of disaster agencies and local professional networks, to collaborate in research and mapping of best practices and potential of ICTs.



## Communications with Affected Communities

One partnership often neglected is between the humanitarian community and affected communities. Affected populations can be seen just as tragic victims and the passive recipients of external assistance. However, they are also the best source of first-hand information and knowledge needed by the humanitarian community. Symposium participants repeatedly pointed out the lack of two-way information flow and the importance of providing information back to those the humanitarian community is serving and assisting. Many international humanitarian organizations do not actively involve affected communities in IM processes and do not include their representatives in planning, assessments, operations and programme evaluation. Local authorities and affected communities must be recognized as decision makers with ultimate responsibility, and therefore must be provided with the best and most useful information to ensure fast recovery and self-sufficiency.

Face-to-face interaction and communication with affected populations, as well as on-the-ground observation and assessment of their conditions and needs, are the most appropriate ways of creating knowledge for humanitarian organizations. "Seeing it for yourself" adds a great deal to one's knowledge and understanding of any humanitarian emergency, and sometimes contradicts assumptions and impressions gained from documents, briefings and media reporting. Interaction and communication with affected populations serve to remind international humanitarian organizations of the overarching purpose and true clients of humanitarian assistance programs and services.



**"**Information is knowledge, knowledge is power whether you're on the receiving end of it or whether you're creating it and that's why the role of information is so critical in crisis response today."

– **Peter Walker**

Director, Feinstein International Center, Tufts University

Communicating with affected communities often requires entirely different methods and technologies, as well as entirely different languages. In the international humanitarian community, most information is shared in English and the lingua franca of the affected country. It is usually conveyed in written form and transmitted via the Internet as electronic mail and on websites. But in order to share information with affected communities, it must be conveyed in the local languages and even sub-national and ethnic dialects. In order to reach affected communities who are usually cut off from ICT infrastructure, information must be disseminated using alternative media, such as radio, community meetings, public bulletin boards and, increasingly, Web 2.0 technology. The exponential proliferation of mobile telephones in the hands of average people living in developing countries is facilitating the two-way exchange of information and communication, especially via text messaging.

## Lessons Learned and Best Practices

- Humanitarian responses that have put into place effective communications with affected communities have proven to be more efficient, empowering communities to better help themselves, particularly when developed in conjunction with local media actors and systems.
- Programmes designed to enhance two-way information-sharing and communication with affected populations are not mainstreamed into all phases of the humanitarian continuum or the UN cluster system. More needs to be done to financially support the establishment of these projects in the preparedness and early response phase.

## Recommendations

- **Community Engagement**  
Foster a dialogue between humanitarian practitioners and affected communities in disaster response preparedness, response and risk reduction consultations, supported by its integration into standard operating procedures for emergency preparedness and response (through IASC

contingency planning guidelines).

### ■ **Messaging**

Provide easily understandable information to affected communities to encourage and empower people to take action to build and strengthen their resilience. The information should be developed with affected populations, incorporate relevant traditional and indigenous knowledge and cultural heritage and be tailored to different target audiences through both media and non-media communication channels, taking into account cultural and social factors.

### ■ **Public Information**

Provide funding and support to local media and journalistic organizations that have a role in providing information to affected populations in all phases, from preparedness, during response, and into recovery and reconstruction.



“I do believe that the changing flow of information will offer greater opportunity for better cross-cultural understanding of humanitarian crises... [and] to reduce the cultural divide.”

– **Sami Zeidan**

Presenter, Al Jazeera

## Preparedness

Preparedness in the context of humanitarian information refers mainly to having tools and systems with agreed standards and methodologies for data collection established well in advance of an emergency. While this logic is hard to argue, too often this is not the case and humanitarian partners arrive with tools that are not yet field tested or interoperable, with widely differing methods for collecting data for key activities such as needs assessments and without a clear idea as to how or what data should be shared within or across clusters or sectors. Further, there is often little agreement on which data and indicators will be used as baselines and considered authoritative.

More specifically, emergency preparedness related to humanitarian information means ensuring that data, information and analysis can be readily available at the earliest stages to shape decisions for planning, response, and recovery. Preparedness measures such as baseline data acquisition and classification for high-risk areas, national-level capacity-building, and the formation of institutional collaboration and information-exchange relationships would enable information managers and analysts to effectively support assistance efforts once an emergency begins. Preparedness should also include planning for exit strategies and transfer of knowledge and ICT capabilities to national and local entities.

Symposium participants pointed out that information management is often taken for granted by users within the humanitarian community – information is expected to be available as soon as the need occurs but often the preparedness investment has not been sufficient, thereby creating a gap in the early days of an emergency when the need is often the greatest. There needs to be greater organizational commitment, investment and collaboration across the community in information preparedness to allow for more effective data and information collection, management and analysis to support strategic and operational response. This should include investing in appropriate technologies, in ICT equipment as well as in IM training within and across humanitarian organizations. It also should include integrating IM concepts and practice into the working cultures of organizations and into the priorities of senior management.

Information useful for emergency preparedness changes continually and staying up-to-date on the many sources,

organizations and media involved in sharing information requires constant vigilance. Knowing where up-to-date data, information and knowledge can be found is a full-time function, often depending on well-maintained databases, portal websites, and collaborative networks of sources and partners, so that humanitarian actors can hit the ground running fully equipped during sudden onset emergencies.

## Lessons Learned and Best Practices

- Preparedness assessments should include identification of information needs and knowledge gaps, as well as the baseline ICT infrastructure and capacities of the affected country and communities.
- Lessons learned and best practices need to be collected and integrated into training, but they also need to be actively promoted and applied in the early phases of an operation. The outcomes from training and simulation exercises should not be forgotten, but also need to be reinforced and promoted when an emergency occurs.
- Conduct simulation exercises for relevant staff prior to emergencies in order to test plans, reinforce best practices, and promote teamwork and coordination. Simulation exercises are also a good opportunity to test IM procedures and new and unproved technologies and systems.
- Although the humanitarian community has accumulated much experience with disaster risk reduction through the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, little consideration has been given to how humanitarian information can better reinforce and complement the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters.

preparedness phase, particularly those linked to existing initiatives by UN country teams building capacity of local and national institutions and statistical systems. Data collected in the response should be discoverable by users, particularly institutions and individuals within the affected country.

### ■ Service Directory

Develop local, national, regional and international user-friendly directories, inventories and information-sharing systems for the exchange of best practices, cost-effective and easy-to-use humanitarian IM technologies, and lessons learned on policies, plans and measures for their application.

### ■ Risk Reduction

Place more emphasis on the need to reinforce activities relating to the identification, assessment and monitoring of disaster risks and enhanced early warning; strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels and linkages with disaster risk reduction actors, while taking into account ongoing work on these issues on the basis of the Hyogo Framework for Action.

## Recommendations

### ■ Data Preparedness

Using the IASC Contingency Planning Guidelines as a basis, promote the availability and accessibility of minimum common operational data sets in the



## Professionalization

The Symposium participants recognized that an emergence of a professional culture among personnel involved in the field of humanitarian information management called for greater attention, and possibly the creation of a new occupational group. The field currently includes a broad range of multidisciplinary functions and occupational positions, including Information Project Managers, GIS Specialists, Analysts, Public Information Officers, Situation-report Writers, Sector Assessment Experts, Evaluation Specialists, Database Managers, ICT Systems Administrators/Architects, Web/Blog/Wiki Moderators/Editors, IM Liaison Officers and Researchers among others! As these personnel have been more systematically following established principles, standards, and best practices and have required specialized training or educational credentials in various information management and technical fields, Symposium participants indicated an interest in exploring further the professionalization of this emerging occupation.

Humanitarian IM needs to be recognized as a valued and important function within humanitarian organizations and be professionalized through training and development of an appropriate and supportive career path. Many humanitarian organizations consider “managing one’s knowledge” to primarily be an individual’s responsibility, and do not have dedicated staff or units performing this function for the benefit of the entire organization. Humanitarian information professionals would benefit from clearly defined competencies and scopes of work, and possibly certification programs to ensure relevant educational qualifications. Furthermore, these professionals would benefit from continuous educational opportunities, including periodic training and workshops, exposure to a variety of humanitarian environments, and opportunities to exchange lessons and good practice related to shared knowledge and expertise.

Working in the humanitarian field is by its nature very transient and characterized by high turnover and transfer among organizations. Since much of humanitarian work involves responding to emergent disasters and crises, personnel are often assigned or sent to work in temporary or short-term positions. Sometimes these emergency response positions transition into recovery, reconstruction or development jobs in the field. Because of the high personnel turnover and transitioning, the function of information/ knowledge management

becomes very important – capturing, transferring and applying knowledge. The development of a community of practice and a more formal occupational group would be another way to ensure that information professionals from different organizations and sectors could contribute to ensuring that information and knowledge is captured, shared, transferred and applied throughout the entire humanitarian community.

## Lessons Learned and Best Practices

- Humanitarian IM professionals should learn from and incorporate well-established management practices used by the private sector/business community.
- Adopting and adhering to agreed-upon principles, training and skill credentials, and identified best practices assist in establishing humanitarian IM as a professional and recognized function.
- Lessons learned and best practices do not only need to be collected and integrated into training, but they also need to be actively promoted and applied in the early phases of an operation.

## Recommendations

- **Community**  
Formulate a prospectus for an association of humanitarian information professionals or investigate transforming the Humanitarian Information Network into a loose, open humanitarian IM community of practice. Such a professional community of practice might include an online membership directory, periodic meetings and conferences, professional development forums, etc.
- **Training and Certification**  
Promote the inclusion of IM in tertiary studies through increased cooperation with academic institutions and IM practitioners, including the development of a standard training and certification program. Develop a standard training and certification program for humanitarian IM specialists as short course modules for continuing professionals and degree programs.

## ■ Outreach

Develop IM training and learning programmes targeted at specific audiences, including the promotion of community-based training initiatives for national disaster-management agencies and agencies in high-risk countries. In doing so, ensure equal access to appropriate training and educational opportunities for women and vulnerable constituencies; promote gender and cultural-sensitivity training as integral components of IM education and training, including ensuring trainings and systems are multilingual.

## ■ Training and Guidance Materials

Develop, at the IASC and organizational level, guidance and training material, including SOPs, on the collection, processing, classification, dissemination and archiving of humanitarian information.

## ■ Performance Indicators

Develop IM performance indicators, including organizational and individual accountability measures to ensure that IM capacity is a core part of cluster/sector leadership accountabilities.



**“We** sent the media satellite pictures of housing demolitions and in 24 hours we received more media attention on this issue than in 10 years of advocacy on Zimbabwe.”

– Ariela Blatter

Director, Crisis Prevention and Response Center, Amnesty USA, [www.eyesondarfur.org](http://www.eyesondarfur.org)

# Technology/Innovation

Although technology is a crucial part and enabler of information for humanitarian action, the Symposium emphasized that technology is not an end in itself. Too often new technologies and innovations are introduced without full consultation or agreement and fall into disuse once the innovators move on—resulting in loss of investment as well as some disillusion among users. Technology is only effective when it has practical and strategic applications and has been developed with a well-defined purpose to meet the needs of a specific end-user group or audience. Technologies should be developed based upon agreed standards for interoperability and to ensure wide usage throughout the community. Sustained investment and well-maintained data are essential in order to keep technology, tools and systems operating and functional. And finally, these tools and systems require user training, as well as dedicated professionals to design, develop and integrate them into humanitarian applications.

Within the humanitarian community, information management is still largely associated with technology and often falls under the domain of an organization's IT department or division. There needs to be a better understanding and closer working relationship between IT/IM professionals and end-users, including the decision makers and humanitarian practitioners who must be informed to prioritize their work. End-users may not always be trained or inclined to use the latest technologies or tools, but more and more this divide is narrowing as new technologies become more user-friendly and more seamlessly embedded into regular workflow processes.

Symposium participants also reviewed the emergence of Web 2.0 social networking technology, such as blogs, wikis, video podcasts and RSS feeds, among others, which in a short time has changed the way humanitarian information can be collected and disseminated. Implications of these new innovative technologies were also contemplated and the growing accessibility of technology globally, and even in remote areas, has meant that within minutes of a disaster or outbreak of conflict, the first reports and images of the event increasingly come from personal witnesses and “citizen journalists” using mobile phones and other wireless PDA devices. This technology provides new means to transmit information—including from areas that may not have on-the-ground media or a humanitarian presence.

These new technologies will also present challenges because they can also be used to convey misinformation, disinformation, and covert propaganda that could be counter-productive to humanitarian decision-making and operations.

## Lessons Learned and Best Practices

- Use existing and familiar technologies, instead of introducing and experimenting with new, unproven technologies during the critical early phases of an emergency response. Deployed staff should already be trained to use tools and technologies, which should be embedded and support existing processes and systems.
- The bigger the organization and its bureaucracy, the more difficult it is to introduce and adapt to new technologies. Introducing new hardware, software and systems may require significant financial and training investments, involve an onerous computer security testing and accreditation process, and may be met with resistance by personnel accustomed and committed to the existing technology.
- Visualization is an effective strategic information technique for representing complex data and information, displaying patterns, trends and relationships, and depicting a common situational awareness. In this regard, satellite-imagery-derived analysis and GIS are valuable tools to support humanitarian action.
- Collaboration tools need to align with the social networks that already exist or emerge during the onset of an emergency. Tools and services should be easy to use, easy to deploy, and reduce technical dependency. Users are more willing to adopt intuitive tools regardless of the underlying complexity of the tool.



**"N**ew media will change the balance of power between the 'beneficiary' and the external aid worker. New media will keep us all more honest and equitable."

– **Ben Parker**  
Editor-in-Chief, IRIN

## Recommendations

- **Social Networks**  
Strengthen social networks among information experts, managers and planners across sectors and between regions by drawing upon cross-sectoral and cross-regional experience, IM expertise and new media technologies.
- **Free and Open-Source Software**  
When possible, promote the use of free and open-source software to improve access to information and IM systems by all stakeholders in the humanitarian community.
- **Usability Assessments**  
Evaluate and measure the value of new technologies or new media by conducting user surveys and impact assessments, taking into account the local and national capacities and usability, practicality and suitability.

## Capacity-Building

Humanitarian information can only be effective if there are resources and personnel dedicated to developing, sustaining and strengthening capacity to serve their organizations and the community. This requires the mainstreaming of humanitarian IM throughout the entire community, using a variety of initiatives and vehicles, including the IASC Cross-Cluster Information Management Framework, the Emergency Capacity-Building (ECB) project, the ICT4Peace initiative, the Humanitarian Information Network-sponsored symposia and workshops, and other related efforts. This also requires mainstreaming of Humanitarian IM within organizations and partnerships, through sustained core budgeting, dedicated professional staff positions, investment in ICT upgrades and innovation, and a strong and prominent commitment from senior management.



**“B**logs are about sharing best practices, organizing individuals to take action, increasing transparency, and showing what happens beyond the first five days of an emergency.”

– **Neha Viswanathan**  
South Asia Editor, Global Voices, India

At the humanitarian community level, information can be strengthened by high-level endorsement and promotion from inter-agency coordinating bodies, multi-organizational consortia, and community-recognized senior leaders and champions. Common humanitarian information services and tools that benefit the entire humanitarian community, both at headquarters and the field, need to have sustained funding from multiple donors, as well as guaranteed commitment and contributions from the participating implementing organizations. There is also the need to support humanitarian information surge capacities that enhance emergency information preparedness, facilitate inter-agency IM and coordination, and respond to filling identified information needs and knowledge gaps.

Humanitarian IM capacities are also strengthened from collaborative partnerships that share resources and costs. Joint humanitarian IM and ICT training activities, outsourced common technical support services, and shared equipment and resources can increase efficiency and reduce duplicative costs. Recurring costs, such as skills training and hardware and software upgrades, need to be factored into an organization's core budget. Ultimately, establishing a sustained humanitarian IM capability depends on partnering with and investing in local capacities in the host country and transferring these capabilities to local and national institutions.

## Lessons Learned and Best Practices

- Funding of IM at emergency onset directly impacts on the quality and quantity of data available to decision makers. Funding mechanisms should be in place to ensure that initial life-saving decisions are made on the basis of the best possible information available.
- Funding for communications to affected communities is a critically neglected area of humanitarian response, with few donor financing mechanisms dedicated to supporting initiatives in this area.
- Assessment teams should quickly identify the ICT requirements to support humanitarian IM functions, so that ICT can be quickly resourced and deployed.
- Humanitarian IM functions need to be factored into project proposals and design in order to determine whether these capacities can be provided by internal resources, from partner organizations, or require external funding support.



“The perfect information system for donors to allocate funding would be a two-pronged approach from the central and field levels based on ECHO’s global needs assessment using a common humanitarian classification system; a joint approach with IM mainstreamed across the clusters, backed up by a more proactive and empowered OCHA.”

– Johan Heffinck

European Commission Senior Expert, Kenya

## Recommendations

### ■ Advocacy for resources

OCHA should further explore the issue of funding for humanitarian IM activities and the development of an advocacy strategy to support resource mobilization.

### ■ Surge capacity

Rosters of humanitarian IM personnel and inventories of ICT equipment need to be constantly maintained and updated, so that these resources can be quickly mobilized and shared in order to respond to new emergencies or identified requirements.

### ■ Study

Undertake a study to appraise or assess the business case for appropriate investment in information management within all phases of humanitarian action.



# 3 Statement

(30 Nov 2007)





# Statement

## (30 November 2007)

### Introduction

**R**epresentatives of donor agencies, governmental organizations, United Nations agencies, the Red Cross Movement, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), scientific and research institutes, academia, the media and private sector met at the Global Symposium +5 in Geneva on 22-26 October 2007<sup>13</sup>.

The Symposium reaffirmed the outcomes of the 2002 Symposium on Best Practices in Humanitarian Information Management<sup>14</sup> and Exchange, in particular the Statement on Best Practices in Humanitarian Information Management and Exchange, as well as recalling the outcomes of the three Humanitarian Information Network (HIN) Workshops held in Bangkok (2003), Panama (2005), and Nairobi (2006).

By endorsing this Statement participants agreed to: 1) share this Statement and its accompanying Outcomes with their respective organizations; 2) raise the issues herein with international institutions and actors for broader discussion and implementation; 3) that OCHA, in consultation with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and the community of practice on humanitarian information, develop an action plan by March 2008 for the implementation of the Symposium Outcomes<sup>15</sup>, building upon already agreed recommendations arising from IASC consultations in 2006/07 on information management in the context of the humanitarian reform process.

13. United Nations Member States attended the plenary proceedings as observers of the gathering of the community of practice on humanitarian information.

14. The term 'information management' covers 'the various stages of information processing from production to storage and retrieval to dissemination towards the better working of an organization; information can be from internal and external sources and in any format.' Association for Information Management 2005, <http://www.aslib.co.uk> [accessed 16 July 2007].

15. See Outcomes document: <http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium>

### Overview

As the humanitarian landscape has changed, the role of information as central to effective humanitarian coordination and response has also assumed increasing significance. Information has always been a key element in humanitarian action, but recent emergencies and disasters have demonstrated how vital its role is in providing a basis for effective and informed advocacy, decision-making





and resource allocation for affected populations as well as humanitarian actors. Timely, relevant, reliable information that is independent and verifiable is central to saving lives and strengthening recovery. The power of information is lost, however, unless it is turned into action. This requires effective management, analysis and communication.

Symposium participants recognized the positive efforts by national governments, donor agencies and disaster

management agencies, governmental organizations, United Nations agencies, the Red Cross Movement, non-governmental organizations, scientific and research institutes, academia, the media and private sector to improve humanitarian information management and exchange since the 2002 Symposium. Considerable progress has been made in the last five years in the development of more sophisticated information tools, products and analyses and the establishment of commonly agreed standards for their application in the field. New technologies and innovative approaches have provided increased opportunities for interaction and information-sharing among the humanitarian community, and between the humanitarian community and affected populations as never before. However, much remains to be done to ensure that the sharing of information leads to more effective humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery.

Symposium participants stressed that all entities within the humanitarian community, in particular the IASC, cluster/sector leads and OCHA, should accelerate ongoing efforts to integrate previously endorsed information management principles, practices, systems, capacities and standards into the broader humanitarian reform process.

Participants endorsed this Statement as a common vision of the central role of information in support of effective humanitarian preparedness, response and recovery. They also agreed on the need to strengthen the existing community of practice on humanitarian information, the Humanitarian Information Network (HIN)<sup>16</sup>, expanding its membership and building upon its work to date.



16. The HIN was established following the 2002 Symposium on Best Practices in Information Management and Exchange and developed further through regional workshops in Bangkok (2003), Panama (2005) and Nairobi (2006).

# Principles of Humanitarian Information Management and Exchange

Symposium participants reviewed and amended the Principles of Humanitarian Information Management and Exchange that were endorsed by the 2002 Symposium to better reflect the humanitarian environment of today. In endorsing the revised principles, the Symposium reiterated the need to develop and encourage accountability in the application of the principles.

## Accessibility

Humanitarian information and data should be made accessible to all humanitarian actors by applying easy-to-use formats and by translating information into common or local languages. Information and data for humanitarian purposes should be made widely available through a variety of online and offline distribution channels, including the media.

## Inclusiveness

Information management and exchange should be based on collaboration, partnership and sharing with a high degree of participation and ownership by multiple stakeholders, including national and local governments and, especially, affected communities whose information needs should equally be taken into account.

## Interoperability

All sharable data and information should be made available in formats that can be easily retrieved, shared and used by humanitarian organizations.

## Accountability

Information providers should be responsible to their partners and stakeholders for the content they publish and disseminate.

## Verifiability

Information should be accurate, consistent and based on sound methodologies, validated by external sources and analyzed within the proper contextual framework.

## Relevance

Information should be practical, flexible, responsive and driven by operational needs in support of decision-making throughout all phases of a crisis. Data that is not relevant should not be collected.

## Impartiality

Information managers should consult a variety of sources when collecting and analyzing information so as to provide varied and balanced perspectives for addressing problems and recommending solutions.

## Humanity

Information should never be used to distort, to mislead or to cause harm to affected or at-risk populations and should respect the dignity of victims.

## Timeliness

Humanitarian information should be collected, analyzed and disseminated efficiently and must be kept current.

## Sustainability

Humanitarian information and data should be preserved, cataloged and archived, so that it can be retrieved for future use, such as for preparedness, analysis, lessons learned and evaluation. The use of Open Source Software should be promoted to further enhance access to information by all stakeholders in a sustainable way. When possible, post-emergency data should be transitioned to relevant recovery actors and host governments and training provided on its use.

## NEW PRINCIPLES:

### Reliability

Users must be able to evaluate the reliability and credibility of data and information by knowing its source and method of collection. Collection methods should adhere to global standards where they exist to support and reinforce credibility. Reliability is a prerequisite for ensuring validity and verifiability.

### Reciprocity

Information exchange should be a beneficial two-way process between the affected communities and the humanitarian community, including affected governments.

### Confidentiality

The processing<sup>17</sup> of any personal data<sup>18</sup> shall not be done without the prior explicit description of its purpose and will only be done for that purpose, and after prior informed<sup>19</sup> consent of the individual concerned. Sufficient safeguards must be put in place to protect personal data against loss, unauthorized processing and other misuse. If sensitive information is publicly disclosed, the sources of such information will not be released when there is a reasonable risk that doing so will affect the security or integrity of these sources.

17. Processing is, among others, collection, recording, organization, storage, alteration, consultation, use, disclosure, erasure.

18. Personal data is information relating to an identified or identifiable person.

19. "Informed" includes the source being aware that providing information will not ensure that they will be protected by the organization.



# 4 Conclusion

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# Conclusion

**I**nformation is the cornerstone of humanitarian action. Without information the humanitarian community would not know how many people are affected, what their needs are, and what needs to be done in response. It underpins every aspect of humanitarian work, and if used wisely, can result in timely and appropriate assistance to those in need.

The breadth and diversity of representation at the Symposium was a powerful demonstration of the value placed by the humanitarian community on information for humanitarian action. Each participant brought personal and institutional viewpoints, experiences and evidence from their work that highlighted the critical nature of humanitarian information exchange.

It was evident from the panel debates and discussions that followed that the challenges faced by the humanitarian community in operating in today's humanitarian environment have increased significantly since the Symposium in 2002. But at the same time, advances in technology and significant improvements in how information is managed and exchanged are providing the humanitarian community the tools and skills to tackle these challenges head-on. This was highlighted by the wide array of tools and activities presented at the Symposium, all aimed at improving humanitarian preparedness, response and early recovery.

Recent initiatives aimed at supporting preparedness include **RedHum**<sup>20</sup>, or **Red Humanitaria** (Humanitarian Network), developed for Latin America following the 2005 Panama HIN workshop, and built around a website providing timely and reliable documents, maps and resources in Spanish. While the current version focused mainly on Central America and the Caribbean, the project's subsequent phases involve expanding to Andean and MERCOSUR countries. Other initiatives include **PreventionWeb**<sup>21</sup>, a project of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), which is being piloted with



**I**would like to make a little prediction. Within five years, most people who currently use the Web, will be using some form of virtual world."

– **Anuradha Vittachi**  
Co-founder, OneWorld

the aim of providing a new information service to increase knowledge on Disaster Risk Reduction; and **HewsWeb**<sup>22</sup>, established by WFP as a global multi-hazard Web service.

Among the newer initiatives for improving response actions is the WHO-driven common data-exchange platform, the **Health and Nutrition Tracking Service** (HNTS). Another significant initiative in the last five years is the **Emergency Capacity Building**<sup>23</sup> project aimed at building stronger staff capacity, accountability and impact measurement, risk reduction, and use of information and technology in response actions.

Geographic information and mapping at all phases of humanitarian action have advanced significantly<sup>24</sup>. Web-based mapping tools, such as **Google Earth**, have opened map-making to the larger public, and enhanced access to satellite imagery<sup>25</sup> has provided a window for information on vulnerable populations in remote areas<sup>26</sup>. The NGO community in particular is designing initiatives looking to the future, Humaninet's "**Maps 2.0**" initiative is building a community of practice for NGO GIS experts, and **OneWorld** has developed **OneClimate.net**, using Web 2.0-based space aimed at tackling climate change.

22. For more information: <http://www.hewsweb.org>

23. Operated by Oxfam-Great Britain, Save the Children-US, World Vision International, Catholic Relief Services, International Rescue Committee, CARE International, and Mercy Corps. <http://www.ecbproject.org>

24. Through activities of the UN Geographic Information Working Group (UNGIWG), which is in the process of establishing the UN Spatial Data Infrastructure Project (UNSDI); the Geographic Information Support Team (GIST) which has an explicit humanitarian focus; and the widening installed base of geospatial tools such as GeoNetwork opensource.

25. UNOSAT is providing enhanced access to satellite imagery and Geographic Information System (GIS) services and products, for humanitarian relief, disaster prevention and post crisis reconstruction.

26. Such as Amnesty International and its use of satellite imagery in remote areas providing evidence for advocacy purposes.

20. Supported by CEPREDENAC and the regional IASC and hosted by the OCHA regional office. For more information: <http://www.redhum.org>

21. For more information: <http://www.preventionweb.net>

Much progress has also been made through humanitarian reform's standardized cluster system, which established 11 clusters<sup>27</sup> of response agencies, identifying a single agency with overall cluster-specific responsibility and the role to act as "provider of last resort". The cluster system is to be implemented, following a decision by the UN's highest in-country authority, for all "new" emergencies requiring a multi-sectoral response. As of June 2007, seven of the 11 clusters (nine of the 11 lead agencies) had established dedicated IM support at the global level<sup>28</sup>. All clusters included IM activities among their priorities and projects in the 2007-2008 *Appeal for Building Global Humanitarian Response Capacity*<sup>29</sup>. The cluster system, combined with an IASC-endorsed guidance document outlining the role of information management within the cluster approach, provides the basis for a more predictable and coordinated humanitarian response<sup>30</sup>.

Despite such progress, the humanitarian community still faces many of the challenges highlighted five years ago. Information practitioners still grapple daily with information overload, incompatible technologies, non-standard data sets, lack of resources and competing policies and mandates. Changing the culture of information exchange within the humanitarian community still has a long way to go. Information sharing by various partners remains voluntary and based on goodwill rather than on enforced agreements. There is no accountability in not sharing information.

## Next Steps

The Symposium was an opportunity to generate new ideas to these old issues and produce something tangible, useful and collective. The resulting Final Statement, adopted by the participants, captures both the substance and the spirit of the Symposium in a collection of principles, themes, best practices and recommendations that lay the groundwork for future action.

Preparatory work has already begun on some of the key recommendations, such as improving assessment methods and developing a common classification of emergencies. The IASC has requested OCHA to map

the various assessment initiatives being carried out by different organizations<sup>31</sup>, outline best practices and gaps, and facilitate the development of a common analytical framework. The **Assessment and Classification of Emergencies (ACE) project** launched in late 2007 has been tasked with developing this common approach. Its first task is to select and pilot a limited number of humanitarian indicators for each cluster or sector, capitalizing on work previously completed by the agencies. The agreed indicators will then be used to develop and pilot a common humanitarian classification system in two countries in 2008, building on the experience of the **Integrated Food Security and Humanitarian Phase Classification (IPC) system** developed by the Food and Agricultural Organization's Food Security Analysis Unit in Somalia.

Progress made on this initiative, and many others included as recommendations in the 2008 action plan will be regularly updated and posted on ReliefWeb. Efforts to strengthen humanitarian information management and continue the work of the Inter-Agency Information Working Group will continue, and will seek closer collaboration from the wider humanitarian information community.

While the 2002 Symposium concluded that the greatest challenge was "creating a culture of information-sharing that promotes the free flow of data, information and ideas"<sup>32</sup>, five years later the diverse community gathered at the Symposium +5 can be confident that its culture has developed significantly, through multiple initiatives, including the 2008 action plan, work by cluster lead and partner agencies, increasing engagement by academic institutions, and upcoming events convened by ISCRAM and InterAction. These events, along with future regional HIN workshops, offer opportunities and next steps in advancing this culture and leading improvements to the delivery of information for humanitarian action.

27. Agriculture, Camp Coordination/Management, Early Recovery, Education, Emergency Shelter, Emergency Telecommunications, Health, Logistics, Nutrition, Protection and Water Sanitation Hygiene

28. Cited from: Larsen, L. - Strengthening Humanitarian Information Management: A Status Report. OCHA, June 2007

29. See the full appeal: <http://ochaonline3.un.org/cap2005/webpage.asp?Page=1566>

30. IASC Endorsed October 2007 - Operational Guidance on Responsibilities of Sector Cluster Leads and OCHA in Information Management V2.0

31. This includes the Initial Rapid Assessment tool (IRA), the Integrated Food Security and Humanitarian Phase Classification (IPC), WHO's Health and Nutrition Tracking Service and the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment work of the early recovery cluster.

32. Symposium Final Report, 2002.



# Annex A – Structure and Proceedings

**To** achieve the Symposium's objective in five days, 22-26 October, the event's structure and proceedings were designed to flow between technical-level working groups and larger plenary-panel sessions. Figure 2 shows the links between the working groups, panel sessions of the plenary and the final Statement review session.

## Working Groups

Five working groups were held on **22-23 October**, and comprised between 17 and 30 members selected for their experience relating to the topic of discussion, listed below and summarized in Annex D. Each group was facilitated by an experienced humanitarian IM professional who kept discussions inclusive and on track towards the deadline for presentation to the plenary. Notetakers kept records of discussions, and OCHA focal points were present throughout to provide any necessary resources and ensure smooth-running.

### Working Group 1

#### Protection Information

Facilitator: Jenny McAvoy, OCHA

### Working Group 2

#### Humanitarian Information Exchange in the Field

Facilitator: Kathleen Miner, OFDA

### Working Group 3

#### Humanitarian Financing Supported by Information and Analysis

Facilitator: Sue Lautze, The Livelihoods Program

### Working Group 4

#### Innovation to Improve Humanitarian Action

Facilitator: Bartel Van de Walle, Tilburg University/ISCRAM

### Working Group 5

#### Communication to Affected Communities in Crises

Facilitator: Imogen Wall, BBC Trust

The two-day discussions allowed each group to examine the issues related to their topic by identifying best practices, lessons learned and recommendations. These outcomes were loaded on PowerPoint slides<sup>33</sup> for report-back to the plenary on the third and fourth days, 24-25 October. Each group was also encouraged to discuss cross-cutting issues – principles and standards – and to incorporate these into their outcomes.

Working-group members<sup>34</sup> merged twice to discuss procedural and cross-cutting issues and to prepare for their plenary presentations. The first of these sessions included a presentation on Standards delivered by Lorant Czarán, ReliefWeb Map Centre Manager. The sessions were co-chaired by Helga Leifsdóttir, ReliefWeb Coordinator, OCHA New York, and Brendan McDonald, Manager, Field Information Services, OCHA New York.

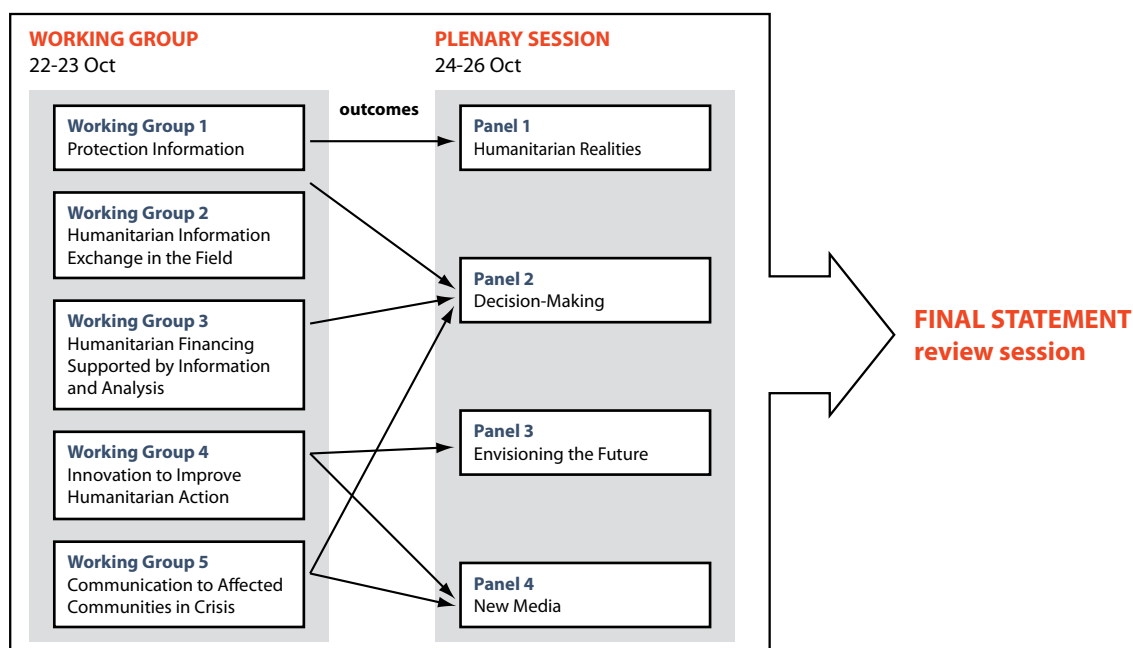
In addition to working groups, two related side events were a session on New Applications, Systems and Networks used by various organizations represented at the Symposium<sup>35</sup> and a "poster presentation" session at which participants showcased their projects or programmes.

33. Working group presentations are available at: [http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/11\\_presentations/presentation1.html](http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/11_presentations/presentation1.html)

34. Working Group participation lists are available at: [http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/4\\_wg\\_panel/participant\\_list.html](http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/4_wg_panel/participant_list.html) and

35. See Annex B, Agenda Day 2



**Figure 2: Event's Structure and Proceedings**

## Plenary Sessions

Days 3, 4 and 5, **24-26 October**, consisted of a much larger, plenary conference addressing the working-group outcomes, hosting panels that further explored working-level discussions, and presiding over endorsement of the final Symposium statement. Plenary Chair was Sharon Rusu, Chief, External Relations and Support Mobilization Branch, OCHA Geneva. She was supported by two Working Chairs: Alta Haggarty, Chief a.i., Advocacy and Information Management Branch, OCHA New York, and Besida Tonwe, Head of OCHA Regional Office for Central and East Africa.

Each plenary day opened with a keynote address from a distinguished authority in the field of humanitarian affairs, human rights or information and knowledge. 24 October was opened by Larry Prusak, Distinguished Scholar in Residence, Babson College, Founder and former Executive Director of the Institute for Knowledge Management. 25 October was opened by John Holmes, UN Emergency Relief Coordinator/Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. 26 October was opened by Payam Akhavan, Professor of International Law, Chair of the Global Conference on the Prevention of Genocide, McGill University.

The plenary sessions that followed were built around four panel discussions, summarized in Annex E. Each five-person panel was led by a moderator and included speakers with recognized expertise from UN agencies, NGOs, governments, the media and academia. These panels were formed in the following way<sup>36</sup>:

### Panel 1

#### Humanitarian realities

**Peter Walker**, Director, Feinstein International Center, Tufts University (Moderator)

**Benita Diop**, Executive Director, Femmes Africa Solidarité

**Jemilah Mahmood**, President, MERCY Malaysia

**David Nabarro**, UN System Senior Coordinator for Avian and Human Influenza

**David Shearer**, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator Iraq

36. Presentations delivered during these sessions are on CDROM available by request through the Symposium website: <http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium>

## Panel 2

### Decision-making

**Nan Buzard**, American Red Cross (Moderator)

**Bo Asplund**, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator  
Afghanistan

**Johan Heffnick**, ECHO Nairobi

**Leila Pakala**, Head, UNICEF Mozambique

**Paulo Zucula**, Director of Mozambique's Disasters  
Management Institute

## Panel 3

### Envisioning the future

**James Darcy**, ODI (Moderator)

**Sanjana Hattotuwa**, Senior Advisor, ICT4Peace  
Foundation

**Rima Qureshi**, Vice President, Ericsson

**Anuradha Vittachi**, Co-Founder, OneWorld/OneClimate

**Sami Zeidan**, Presenter, Al Jazeera International

## Panel 4

### New media

**Martyn Broughton**, Alert Net (Moderator)

**Ariela Blatter**, Amnesty International

**Tarik Kafala**, BBC News Online, Middle East

**Ben Parker**, IRIN

**Neha Viswanathan**, Global Voices

During the final plenary session, Symposium Rapporteur Dennis King distributed a draft version of the Statement to all participants for comment. Plenary Chair Sharon Rusu then led a drafting session, during which participants accepted or rejected revisions suggested by their peers. Those accepted were recorded and incorporated into an updated version, published on the Symposium website for additional feedback.



# Annex B – Agenda

## DAY 1

Monday, 22 October 2007

9:30	<b>Welcome and expectations speech</b> <b>Alta Haggarty</b> Chief a.i., Advocacy and Information Management Branch, OCHA New York
10:00	<b>Presentation on standards</b>
10:30	<b>Working Groups:</b> 1. Protection Information 2. Humanitarian Information Exchange in the Field 3. Humanitarian Financing Supported by Information and Analysis 4. Innovation to Improve Humanitarian Action 5. Communication to Affected Communities in Crises
12:00	Lunch
13:00	<b>Working Groups</b> (continued)
17:00	Close

## DAY 2

Tuesday, 23 October 2007

9:00	<b>Welcome</b> <b>Helga Leifsdottir</b> Coordinator, ReliefWeb
9:15	<b>Working Groups</b>
11:30	<b>Presentations of Working Groups outputs</b> Chaired by <b>Helga Leifsdottir</b>
13:00	Lunch
14:00	<b>Working Groups</b> (continued)
15:00	<b>Side event</b> Individual presentations by participants - New Applications, Systems and Networks Chaired by <b>Helga Leifsdottir</b> :  <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Rogério Mobilia Silva</b>, OCHA: Launch of Red Hum, <a href="http://www.redhum.org">www.redhum.org</a> – Network for humanitarian information for Latin America and the Caribbean.</li> <li><b>Einar Bjorgo</b>, UNOSAT: Operational satellite solutions in support to humanitarian response.</li> <li><b>Nick Haan</b>, T-Ana International: Core Concepts of the Integrated Food Security and Humanitarian Phase Classification (IPC).</li> <li><b>Charles Conley</b>, Petri Nevalainen, Information Management and Mine Action Programs: Operational Activity Security Information System (OASIS).</li> <li><b>John Marinos</b>, UNHCR-Branch Office Somalia: Lessons Learned in Remote Monitoring of Protection in Somalia.</li> <li><b>Craig Williams</b>, OCHA Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific: Rapid Assessments using Proxy Indicators (RAPID).</li> <li><b>Giorgio Sartori</b>, World Food Programme: The global appetite for spatial data: can the UN keep pace with the demand? Geographic Information Support Team (GIST).</li> <li><b>Suha Elgen</b>, UN Geographic Information Working Group (UNGIWG) Secretariat: UN Spatial Data Infrastructure and UNGIWG.</li> </ol>

9. **Jenny McAvoy**, OCHA Protection of Civilians Unit:  
Improving Monitoring & Reporting on Humanitarian Access.
10. **Mark Yarmoshuk**, Information Management Consultant:  
Information Management and Mine Action Programs (iMMAP).
11. **Major General Syed Shakeel Hussain**, Government of Pakistan:  
Pakistan Earthquake, October, 2005.
12. **May Jutta**, Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission:  
Pacific Disaster Net Web portal for disaster risk management in Pacific islands region.
13. **Jeroen Ticheler**, UNFAO:  
GeoNetworks, open-source geospatial IM tool.
14. **Kersten Jauer**, UNDP:  
Use of Google applications for information management in Central African Republic.

17:00 Close

## DAY 3

Wednesday, 24 October 2007

### 9:30 Plenary Opening and welcome address

**Sharon Rusu**

Chief, External Relations and Support  
Mobilization Branch, OCHA Geneva

### 9:50 Keynote address

**Larry Prusak**

Distinguished Scholar in Residence, Babson College, Founder and former Executive Director of the Institute for Knowledge Management

10:10 Break

### 10:30 Presentation Working Group 1

#### 11:20 Panel 1: Humanitarian Realities

Moderated by **Peter Walker**, Director, Feinstein International Center, Tufts University

12:50 Lunch

### 14:00 Presentation Working Group 2

### 14:50 Presentation Working Group 3

15:35 Break

### 16:00 Panel 2: Decision-making

Moderated by **Nan Buzard**, Senior Director, International Programmes and Operations, American Red Cross

### 17:30 Wrap-up

**Dennis King**, Rapporteur

Alta Haggarty and Besida Tonwe, Working Chairs

18:00 Close

## DAY 4

Thursday, 25 October 2007

9:00	<b>Welcome</b> <b>Sharon Rusu</b> Chief, External Relations and Support Mobilization Branch, OCHA Geneva
9:10	<b>Keynote address</b> <b>John Holmes</b> UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs
9:30	<b>Presentation Working Group 4</b>
10:15	Break
10:30	<b>Panel 3: Envisioning the Future</b> Moderated by <b>James Darcy</b> , Director, Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Develop Institute
12:00	Lunch
13:00	<b>Presentation Working Group 5</b>
13:45	Break
14:00	<b>Panel 4: New Media</b> Moderated by <b>Martyn Broughton</b> , Editor, Alert Net
15:30	<b>Wrap-up</b> <b>Dennis King</b> , Rapporteur <b>Alta Haggarty</b> and <b>Besida Tonwe</b> , Working Chairs
16:00	<b>Poster Presentations</b>
18:00	Reception

## DAY 5

Friday, 26 October 2007

9:00	<b>Welcome</b> <b>Sharon Rusu</b> Chief, External Relations and Support Mobilization Branch, OCHA Geneva
9:10	<b>Keynote address</b> <b>Payam Akhavan</b> Professor of International Law, Chair of the Global Conference on the Prevention of Genocide, McGill University
9:30	<b>Presentation of Symposium Statement</b> <b>Sharon Rusu</b> Chief, External Relations and Support Mobilization Branch, OCHA Geneva
10:30	Break
11:00	<b>Endorsement of Statement</b> <b>Sharon Rusu</b> Chief, External Relations and Support Mobilization Branch, OCHA Geneva
12:00	<b>Symposium Wrap-up</b> <b>Dennis King</b> , Rapporteur <b>Alta Haggarty</b> and <b>Besida Tonwe</b> , Working Chairs
12:30	Close

# Annex C – Keynote Speeches

## Keynote 1

### Lawrence Prusak

Distinguished Scholar in Residence,  
Babson College,  
Founder and former Executive Director of the Institute for  
Knowledge Management

GENEVA: Wednesday, 24 October, 2007

**It** is very difficult to speak for twenty or twenty-five minutes about a subject that I've studied for the last thirty years or so, and summarize some things that you might find useful. I will do my best, but it is quite a challenge. Let me start by telling you a story, since the only thing that people remember are stories, and it is the best way to communicate knowledge. I'm going to tell you how I got interested in this subject.

Oddly enough I had a grandfather who was from Russia, and at the age of twenty or so he was drafted into the Tsar's army as an officer to fight the Japanese in 1905. The only reason he was made an officer – he was quite a pacific fellow – was that he was six foot five, and the Tsar liked tall people to stand at the head of the regiments. When I first learned about this – I was about twelve years old – I asked my father to tell me this: "What happened in that war?" And my father said: "Well, the Russians got their butts kicked by the Japanese." I was astounded because I had a big map of the world, right in my bedroom, and I could see the Soviet Union was a big country. Then I looked at Japan, and it did not take a lot of energy to see that it is a small country. I also happen to know a number of Russians – I grew up in New York City – and the Russians are fairly large people. The Japanese people I met, again in New York, were fairly small. And I could not understand how such a big country with big people could be beaten by a small country with small people. And my father told me, he said: "Well, the Japanese knew more about fighting a war." And I pondered on that because as a boy you just think about size and strength rather than knowing things.

And I pondered and pondered. I went to university and began studying history. I began to realize that what a country knows is much more valuable than its size or its resources. In fact, resources can be a trap for countries, as many of you know. And I became interested in questions like: How does a country, or a group of people, or any aggregate actually know anything? What accounts for that knowledge? How do they gain new knowledge? How do they use the knowledge they have?





And once I sort of went down to the world, I tried to make a living discussing this in research. For many years no one was interested in this. I lived a lonely life, to say nothing of an impoverished one. And then, oddly enough, for reasons we just do not have time to go into here, the world became very interested in knowledge, from about 1985 forward. It has a great deal to do with technology and the integration of China and India into the world economy. And from that point on a number of researchers, myself included, a worldwide network of people, have been studying how knowledge works – in countries, in organizations, in networks.

And I thought perhaps it might be a good idea in the small time we have to just give you some findings, some conclusions, some things we collectively have learned about knowledge in the world. I'm sorry, this is perhaps the single worst way to talk about knowledge – sage on a stage, someone standing up here lecturing you. I'm sure all of you know, you have been to universities. It is a terrible way to exchange knowledge, but here we are. So I'm just going to tell you these things and walk away. You are going to have to ponder them yourself. I would be happy to answer questions, but there is no time. If you want to send me an e-mail, I will answer it if I can.

Let us talk a little about knowledge as distinct from information. Now we are going to talk about a different subject. Now I know many of you here are fascinated with information management, a subject I have written about and agree with. It is a very important subject. You cannot run an organization, you cannot do anything without information. But it is not the same thing as knowledge. Do not conflate the two things. If you can remember one thing I am telling you: They are different things. You could say, "Information is knowledge represented and codified". Represented and codified. But they are not the same thing. If they were the same thing, the world would look like a very different place than what it is. Data is not information, information is not knowledge, knowledge is not wisdom. These are separate things with separate words for good reason. It is only in English that we have one word for knowledge. Most languages have two or three words. Classical Greek had five words for knowledge, which made much more sense.

So, let me just put on my glasses. Don't get older. It is the best advice I can give you. There is very little in it. Trust me, I know that is true.

Knowledge is a very different economic entity, a very

different thing than the traditional sources of wealth, which are land, labour and capital. Land, labour, and capital, which is what most of our economics is based on, is depleted when you use it. Knowledge is not depleted when you use it. You gain more knowledge. I do not leave this room acting stupider. I do not lose knowledge by telling you what I know. It is a different type of thing. It is elastic, almost infinitely, you can do all sorts of things with it, it is a very different thing. It grows with use. It is very asymmetric, very asymmetric, and it is intimately tied up with other things – "externalities" economists say – trust, cognitive authority, unlike land, labour and capital, which are somewhat more standard things.

You can read ten books on this subject. It is very, very interesting. But if the economy of your country or any organization is based on knowledge, you need very different indicators and understanding of how knowledge works. You cannot use standard economics, it will not work. Standard economics, political science, sociology – it is based on information, and knowledge is a different thing.

Knowledge is what groups of people know – deep rich understanding, deep rich context, tacit heuristics. These are different things than information, which is the message. Information can best be understood as a message. It has a sender, it has a receiver, it is bounded by a repository, and the intent of information is to inform you. Knowledge is a flow – it is what groups of people know. If I had to find synonyms for knowledge, if the word "knowledge" was banned from the English language, I would use "understanding", "meaning" or "context".

So here is one of the things we learned about knowledge: it is profoundly social. In fact, some philosophers have said that there is no such thing as individual knowledge, just individual memories. Those countries and those organizations that have trust and high social functioning have a tremendous advantage in a knowledge-based economy.

One of the least valuable things the United States and the UK have bestowed to the world is a cult of individualism, because individualism may be very useful for certain things, but terrible for knowledge. It does not matter what individuals know, it matters greatly what groups of people know. Now what do I mean by groups: practices, communities, networks. That's where you find knowledge. Knowledge clumps in groups, usually fifty to three or four hundred people, sometimes thousands of people. You



have what we call invisible colleges: researchers around the world connected electronically, who trust each other and share knowledge. So it is profoundly social.

Knowledge is also local, sticky and contextual. The most valuable knowledge is the interface between a worker and a workforce, between someone doing something. That is what I have learned from understanding how humanitarian organizations work: the real knowledge is in the field. It is where people are actually doing the work. And that is true for organizations, that is true everywhere. We still live in a world which has headquarters and has the field. In organizations in the United States we say someone is in the head office or in the field. That is dead. In a knowledge-based world that is absolutely irrelevant. Knowledge is most useful when it is local.

It is also sticky. That is a technical word economists use, “sticky”. Knowledge stays where it is. It is very hard to move it, it is not transferable the way land, labour and capital is. Twelve trillion dollars goes around the world every day, along with all sorts of futures and options and contracts. You cannot move knowledge that way. If you could, if you could, a lot of the problems you people are addressing would be solved like this. Medical knowledge: just send it here. You can send information like this around the world. Anyone with a computer can press a button and send information. You can’t send knowledge. If you could, it would be a very different world.

One of the great revolutions of the late 20th century, if someone is writing a history of the world five hundred years from now, is the absolute plummeting of transaction costs for information. Information has become ubiquitous, cheap and easily accessible. It used to be a very expensive thing. Certain countries had a monopoly on information. Certain areas had a monopoly on information. Gone. That is dead. But it is not true for knowledge. Knowledge is a very expensive thing to buy, to develop, retain and transfer. Again, it is an expensive thing. That is why people do not like working with it. They just assume: “Well, let’s just send out a million documents”. Something like e-learning is a good example of that. Companies and organizations do not like spending money to actually teach people, so they give you a disk instead. It is much cheaper. It is not effective at all, but it’s a lot cheaper.

Knowledge comes in many shapes and forms. There is a morphology, a spectrum of how it is delivered or packaged or used. From conversations, stories, legends, myths on one end of the spectrum right through to

algorithms, formulas, blueprints. All of those things are ways to convey, package and shape knowledge. One is not more valuable than the other.

In the United States, probably since the end of World War II, there has been the assumption that scientific and technical knowledge is privileged above other types of knowledge. That is not true. It is not true historically. It is not true in real life. Stories, legends, myths, norms – they are every bit as important as formulas, algorithms or codified forms. Knowledge is knowledge. If it helps people, if it enables you to learn to do something, if it enables you to learn to act in a different way, it is valuable. Most people learn through stories and narratives. Most people learn through stories. They do not learn through PowerPoint and they do not learn through long dispositions. They learn through stories.

When organizations try to do things about knowledge, try to act about knowledge, there are usually three activities they do. This is also true for countries, I may add. They first try to develop knowledge: What don’t we know that we should know, and how do we get it? Again, this is not buying information or acquiring information, a child with a laptop can do that. How do we gain knowledge? How do we gain knowledge? How do we develop it: Buy it? Lease it? Beg for it? Borrow it? There are various ways, but this is a tremendous issue for any organization. How do we develop knowledge? A second thing that is equally important is how do we retain knowledge? How do we make it useful? How do we get it into the institutions, the cultures, our ways of working?

Generally there are two roads to go about this. One is embodying knowledge, human capital theory. People learn how to do something. They embody the knowledge itself. A second way is embedding it in the routines, the processes, the ways of working, in any organization. You need both. You cannot depend just on human capital because people die, they leave, they move on. Global migration of talent is a huge issue, as I am sure you all know. But if you just depend on routinization, or processes, or various ways of embedding, that will not work either. You will need human beings to find new knowledge, to change things as they go. So those are the two roads of retaining knowledge. Knowledge is also retained in cultures. Cultures are emblematic of attitudes towards knowledge.

The third and most difficult of all, and something that all of you, I think, are intimately concerned with, is how do we

transfer knowledge? If one group of people knows how to do something that is useful, that is valuable, such as preventing childhood diarrhoea, or working with nature's calamities – real knowledge, tacit, deep rich knowledge – how can we transfer that? This is still a great problem in the world. We do not have a rule book. I cannot give you, unlike subjects of science and mathematics, a book and say: "Here is how to do this". It is still case-based. We are still experimenting. But we have learned that people learn by adaptation and adoption. They learn by doing, they learn by working with others. They do not so much learn in a classroom, they do not so much learn by reading documents. Deep rich learning, tacit learning is almost always accomplished by actually participating, doing, mentoring, working with people who know what they are doing – the old apprenticeship model. It is still the only way to transfer really tacit, rich knowledge and understanding. Do not get fooled into believing that you can transfer knowledge easily by training exercises, e-learning, stuff on a disk, giving everyone a laptop computer. One of the silliest statements I have ever heard in my life, and I have heard many, I am sure all of you have – by the time you reach my age you have heard an enormous amount of stupid statements – was: I heard Bill Clinton and Tony Blair at a meeting like this, each saying "If we could give every child a laptop computer, every poor child, we would eliminate poverty." I think they actually meant it, but it is incredible lack of understanding of what poverty is and the difference between knowledge and information. If it were true, I am sure they could talk IBM into giving a computer to everyone, or talk Microsoft into doing it. But it is not true. Information does not change things that much, in terms of transferring knowledge. Doing things is the way to transfer knowledge – tacitly apprenticing, doing things, participating, learning by doing. It is the only way we know to do this. I wish there were a shortcut but there isn't.

Knowledge is very expensive. About sixty per cent of any organization – the money they spend on non-capital goods – is spent on knowledge. Hard to believe that, but it is true. Not only the obvious things – training, learning, reputation, brand management, marketing – but the difference of what you pay people. I used to work for IBM many years ago, and when I joined IBM I was fifty years old, more or less. If you took someone with the exact same qualifications who was thirty years old, they must have paid me ten times what they paid that thirty-year-old person. What did they buy? I was fatter, balder, crankier, harder to work with. Why did they pay me ten times as much? Theoretically it is because of what I knew.

The rough, pretty rough guide, but nonetheless it is true, is that what we pay for is knowledge. It certainly is not energy or good looks. It must be knowledge. And we all do this. We pay more for people who theoretically know more because they have certain experience, experience being the strongest base for knowledge. It is not an exact science. You can have plenty of experience and not know things. I have been married more than once so I assure you this is true. If you have raised children you also know what I am talking about. But experience is the closest approximation we can make.

There is no shortcut for knowledge. If you want to learn a foreign language – I have recently spent quite a bit of time in Latin America, and I thought I would try to brush up my Spanish, which I had not taken in many years – it takes the same amount of time to learn Spanish today as it took in the year 1500. If you want to learn a language it is expensive and time-consuming. There is no shortcut. It does not matter if you have the Internet or not. And it is even more expensive to learn science because more is known. Think of the difference. Ask yourself a question: If someone graduates from a university and has a degree in chemistry – so they are twenty-three years old and graduate with a degree in chemistry – are they a chemist? Ask yourself that question: Do other chemists view them as a chemist? If not, what are they missing? What that missing is, is knowledge, based on experience and real participation and understanding. Knowledge is not technology. Technology is a useful thing: it moves the world, it creates great productivity and great wealth, but it is not knowledge. If someone wants to sell you a knowledge system, hold on to your wallet, because they are selling you something. It is a consultant selling you something. The best value of systems is to present information, convey information – a lot of you know that OCHA and others have this – and to point to who knows what, to locate people who know things. If locating them were the same thing as accessing their knowledge, why are the airplanes all full? I bet I am not the only one in the room who travels all the time. And all the planes are full. If location did not matter, if information was the same thing as knowledge, why are the planes full? No one likes flying. It is a disgusting and terrible thing to do, very expensive and inconvenient, and yet we all do it because we want access to knowledge. It is not the same as information.

The last point I make, and it is always the most important: The organizations we all live in – me, you, all our friends and relatives – most of them were developed, or the models for how to organize, were developed in the late

19th century. And they came about because technology had allowed us to do tasks that were complex and could be done over space. The railroads in the United States, large-scale textile manufacturing in the UK, chemicals and industrial equipment in Germany, steel and munitions in Japan – these all came about in the middle to late 19th century. The model that was used to build these large organizations, the model was the military, because there was no other model available. And the military had been around since the beginning of human organizations. The organizing principles of those organizations were command, control and fear. Command, control and fear, and it worked. It worked. The aggregate wealth of the world has increased at least twelve times from 1880 to the present. That is a lot of wealth; all of us are much wealthier than our grandparents. We have more things, we are healthier, and we are wealthier. Make no mistake about it. That is true. But it was based on the manipulation of land, labour, and capital. It doesn't work for knowledge. It doesn't work for knowledge. Knowledge is a collective social entity. You need to bring the collective knowledge of an organization to bear on an issue. Silos and bureaucracies and hierarchies are no good for that.

As we have fluid labour markets, people with the most knowledge do not want to work in hierarchical 19th century organizations. In your own lifetime – those of you who are younger than me, which is probably everyone here – you will be working in organizations that look very different. Maybe they will look more like McKinsey, or Google, or Oxford University, or Tata Consulting, but they will not look like Ford, or Unilever, or other large 19th century organizations. Not for any altruistic reasons, but because the need to develop, retain, and transfer knowledge, the need to do that will be so strong in any type of organization that that model will not be effective, and models will change, they will change radically. This will not happen tomorrow. It will be incremental and many organizations will fail to change because they just can't do it. Change is a rare thing; it is hard to do it. But they will have to change, because we live now in a knowledge-driven world.

## Keynote 2

### John Holmes

UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs

GENEVA: Thursday, 25 October, 2007

**I am delighted to have this opportunity to give you all something of my own perspective in the role of information and knowledge management in the better provision of humanitarian relief, and how I see it fitting into the many challenges we face, not only those of today but also the new issues we can see coming up in the next few years.** I like to think I am a pragmatic, straightforward sort of person, and I will try to frame what I say accordingly. Because at the end of the day what matters is what makes a difference on the ground – whether we save lives or not, whether we help people cope with disaster or not.

I come from a professional background – the world of diplomacy – where information and words are absolutely key to everything we do. The collection and analysis of information, questions about with whom to share it – and more importantly sometimes – with whom not to share it, were and are fundamental to understanding and to success. And how this information and analysis was expressed and conveyed – the exact words, the precise nuances, the constructive ambiguity, the hidden as well as the open messages – was an indispensable tool of the trade. I had expected, in coming into the humanitarian world at the beginning of the year, to find a very different context – much more practical and operational, more hands-on, much less concerned with the subtleties of diplomatic word-games. And I have to say I looked forward to this change.

What I actually found was that I was only half right. Humanitarians are, rightly, much less concerned with the infinite variations of language, much happier to call a spade a spade, if not a bloody shovel. Nuance is not the community's strongest point, and has relatively little

value. Where I was profoundly mistaken was to imagine that information and analysis would be a less central concern, or would be somehow easier. What I have learned in my first months is that while some facts are obvious – the flood, the earthquake, the conflict, the exodus of refugees and IDPs – and some consequences are all too visible – death, destruction, despair – as soon as you start to dig deeper you run into the central and glaring need for really good information and really good analysis. In other words decent knowledge. Without that you can't really get off first base. You don't know what people really need or where or how urgently. You can't make sensible

decisions about priorities – whether within or between emergencies. And you can't communicate credibly with all the other people you need to influence – the media, the donors, the local authorities and, the most neglected of all from this point of view, the beneficiaries themselves.

My visits to the crisis areas in Darfur, in Chad, in the DRC, in Somalia and elsewhere; my discussions with agencies and NGO's; my encounters with the media; my interactions with governments from all different parts of the development and developing country spectrum, all have contributed to convincing me that good information and good analysis – and the ability to communicate both effectively – are central to everything we do, and central above all to doing it better.

This may seem obvious. I am not sure that it is, or that even now this is fully recognized, even if events like today and the progress made since the first symposium five years ago suggest that this issue is now much better understood. Why do I say this? Because information management is still too often regarded – and I do not exempt OCHA in this regard – as something that a separate bunch of people do, and not necessarily the most senior or best regarded in the organization, rather than as something which is so fundamental that for literally all the key parts of the organization and all the key players in the organization, it must be the major priority – because without it all else will turn out to be inadequate in one way or another.

And information itself is very directly about saving lives. If we take the wrong decisions, make the wrong choices about where we put our money and our effort because our knowledge is poor, we are condemning some of the most deserving to death or destitution, and helping the relatively less needy when they do not require our relief so desperately. And in a context where resources are almost always going to fall short of the needs, we are always going to have to make these kinds of choices, and to set these kinds of priorities. To put it at its most basic, if we are going to claim at all to be needs-driven, we have to have good knowledge of what those needs are and to have the ability to compare across countries and across continents, and across crises of very different kinds and origins. And this knowledge has to be particularly sound, particularly well-founded on evidence and observation if we are to resist the siren calls of the CNN effect, and of the political choices of others, or the politically correct in today's circumstances.





I have seen this for myself everywhere I have gone – which is of course the value of seeing for yourself and really understanding. The situations in each of the places I have visited have never been quite what I expected or anticipated, even from the good briefings I was given, and certainly in most cases did not conform to the media images I, like everyone else in this media-driven age, had already had formed in my head.

Let me go back a stage, to the challenges we face. The humanitarian community has come a long way in recent years, in my half-outsider, half-insider view. We are better than we used to be at delivering the right help at the right time to the right people. We are better coordinated, more coherent, more predictable, more effective. But we also all know we have a very long way to go:

- the humanitarian system – though it is not a system in the sense of having been designed, but rather a somewhat haphazard collection of agencies, NGOs and other actors – is at best diverse, at worst fragmented. Its major constituent parts are, in most cases, fiercely independent, often competitive, and equipped with overlapping mandates. Not the easiest bunch to coordinate.

- there is much focus on needs assessment and much work on the tools to provide this. But as I have already suggested, we are still a long way from having at our disposal simple, reliable, rapid, cross-sectoral assessments which enable us to set priorities and direct resources in the way that we would like.

- similarly we are all aware of the need for much better impact evaluation. Did we do what we set out to do, and were our intentions the right ones in the first place? Do those we helped agree that we did what they needed? Again much talk, a lot of detailed work, but still no reliable, useable tools, and not much sign of lessons learned.

- availability of funds is already a problem, but this is likely to get worse. Demands for humanitarian assistance are likely to grow, not least under the already dramatically visible effects of climate change and the inexorable rise of extreme weather events affecting millions of lives and livelihoods, even if the death tolls do not always stir our headlines-conscious, story-driven media. So we will almost certainly have to prioritize even more rigorously than now, even if we do manage to increase our resource base somehow.

- the complexity and sensitivity of some of the issues we

are dealing with are also increasing – internal conflicts and IDPs are tougher to tackle than the consequences of classic inter-State wars, and the sensitivity of many governments to the interventions of the international humanitarian community is also on the rise, while access and security of humanitarians are going backwards in many places.

- and last but not least, expectations – from donors, from the media, from the victims of crises themselves – are growing, rightly.

All this reinforces the need to have the best possible information and analysis at our disposal to confront these multiple and increasing challenges successfully – although our responses will never be perfect and we incidentally need to put much more focus on preventive areas like disaster risk reduction, and national and regional disaster preparedness and management capacity-building. And all this also means that we have to get better at information and analysis together, collectively. One of the things that has struck me most forcibly in the last few months, given the diversity / fragmentation of the system, is the importance of partnerships – between UN and non-UN actors, between them and governments, and between all of these and affected populations.

The importance of this partnership in information management is, or should be, obvious. We have to share information and analysis because they are essentially common to us all, what binds us together despite our differences. As you have all recognized, we have to have common principles, common standards, common indicators, common methodologies, and fully open information exchange. We have to be interoperable. We have to be able to compare apples with apples, and distinguish apples from oranges. Then and only then will we have the genuinely satisfactory evidence on which to base our decisions and, particularly important in my own case, our advocacy. Because if we are not credible as humanitarians, we are nothing. We have to be able to assess quickly and credibly the seriousness of a hurricane in Central America versus a flood in Asia and a drought in Africa. We have to be able to distinguish the gravity for the victims of the media-worthy conflict in an easily accessible and 'sexy' part of the world from the long-running and media-neglected, but possibly much more devastating drama in some other remote part of the globe. We have to be able to say reliably when emergency relief can safely give way to rehabilitation and development. We do all these things already, and I am not saying we do them

badly or often get our judgements spectacularly wrong. But we all know we could be better still – and if we as humanitarians are not better at this, from our standpoint of independence, impartiality and humanity, there is not much chance that others will be.

Let me finish with a few points about two key areas: the relationship between information management and humanitarian reform; and the role I see for OCHA in this area.

First, the package of reforms set in train in 2005/6, and which incidentally we should now regard simply as the way we all do business, rather than as experiments still being tried out, i.e., the cluster approach, financing changes, notably CERF and other locally pooled funds, and the strengthening of humanitarian coordinators. I have already talked about the fourth cross-cutting pillar – if a cross-cutting pillar is not a metaphor too far – of enhanced partnerships. These reforms were, and are, aimed at the same goals as improved information management – in other words, greater coherence, predictability, effectiveness and accountability. But there is a much closer relationship than that between information and these reforms. Activating clusters in any given situation not only depends on having sufficient evidence about needs in the first place. Clusters should also be a source of good, reliable, solidly-based and, above all, agreed and shared information and analysis in their specific sectors. And cluster leads should be at the forefront of ensuring this is the case, not least the needs assessment, the who-does-what-where, where the real gaps and duplications lie, communicating this to all those who need to know, and acting on this information in directing or redirecting cluster partners accordingly. And this is why we want to introduce the clusters, progressively but rapidly, into all significant new or continuing humanitarian relief operations.

On the financing side, efficient and rationed resource allocation obviously depends totally on good knowledge and the ability to assess needs and set priorities between different crises and different sectors. For CERF we are doing the best we can with the information we have and the analyses we can do, but I know from experience that this is not as rigorous and scientific as I would like, even if I recognize that tricky judgement calls will always be needed. A rapid and simple system to evaluate the seriousness of a new crisis and where the greatest needs lie is not yet there. And it needs to be. We cannot simply rely on what reaches us from the country

team or the field, vital though this is, without applying some relative judgements at the centre – which means having substantial and verifiable data as far as possible, in the inevitably messy and chaotic circumstances of a humanitarian emergency.

And in the third area of change, the role of humanitarian coordinators, it is self-evident that they cannot do the central and vital job we are demanding of them if they do not have access to good information analysis – about the disasters in their own countries, but also from the centre to enable that information to be put into perspective compared to needs elsewhere.

Finally, what am I calling for from OCHA itself in all this? Our mandate revolves around the coordination of humanitarian response, policy development and advocacy. I hope it is obvious from what I have been saying that we cannot do any of these tasks properly without good, high-quality information and analysis, without good knowledge and the ability to use and disseminate this credibly. That is why I have called for a revolution within OCHA in the way information and analysis are used to drive and support humanitarian relief efforts and advocacy, and have made these a central plank of my vision for OCHA for the next few years. We have to be knowledge brokers and intellectual leaders in this area, and provide reliable and consistent knowledge products which can inform the decision-making and responses of others, as well as our own. In other words, we should be setting the standards and encouraging others to follow, and adding value in the way that we best can, by providing the broad, cross-sectoral overview and big picture of any emergency. More specifically, if each cluster has to be responsible for its own better information flow and better analysis, we have to manage the information flow and analysis across the clusters. And we have to ensure that the information and analysis I have been talking about is available right across the spectrum, from pre-crisis early warnings, through preparedness and response, and onto early recovery, reconstruction, and indeed prevention of recurrence.

These are ambitious targets. But I believe we need to be ambitious in this area above all, because of its centrality to all we do. It is no good having thousands of tons of food or thousands of tents available if we do not know where best to send them, no good knowing houses are damaged if we do not know how badly and what would work best to repair or replace them, no good knowing people affected by the latest floods are in need of help if we

cannot compare their needs rationally with those of the crisis of the previous or following weeks. And by the way, we cannot even begin to achieve any of these ambitious targets without the active cooperation of our partners, i.e. all of you, which will in turn mean you making changes in the way that you do business and sacrificing some of your autonomy in the process.

Let me add a final word about communication. I said at the beginning that I had been half right about the humanitarian community not needing to attach so much importance to the subtleties of word choice. But even here I was only half right too. For humanitarians, good communication is absolutely critical because without it we cannot mobilize the resources and the attention as we have to do, to address the needs we have identified. And while good communication is a skill in its own right, it is also highly dependent on good information and analysis to convince and to be credible. Moreover, as I have suggested already, communicating better with those we are trying to help strikes me as a major gap in our armoury, and yet another key challenge for us in the future.

So for all of these reasons and more, the value of this Symposium and of the work you all do is absolutely clear, and the need to do better equally so. I look forward to hearing the results and the conclusions of your work – the more practical, the better, not least perhaps a mechanism to bring you all together on the issues in a more systematic and results-oriented way. And may I in conclusion wish you all an enjoyable and productive remainder of this Symposium.

## Keynote 3

### Payam Akhavan

Professor of International Law,  
Chair of the Global Conference on the Prevention of  
Genocide,  
McGill University

**GENEVA: Friday, 26 October, 2007**

**T**hank you Madam Chair for your very kind introduction. Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends and colleagues, I am very privileged to be able to share with you some thoughts today about what is unarguably one of the most central challenges of our times, namely the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide.

As I take the parole today to speak with you, I am somewhat nostalgic because it was in this building that I first began my career with the United Nations back in 1993 during the Yugoslav war. Standing here brings to mind the tremendous discrepancy and the tremendous distance between the reality on the ground in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where I was serving at that time as a UN Human Rights Monitor, and the sort of diplomatic discourse that was taking place here in Geneva. The adoption of consensus documents and resolutions and arguing over preamble paragraphs and operative paragraphs, and do we say that we are alarmed by what is happening in Sarajevo or gravely alarmed?

I think that this is really the challenge for all of us who are labouring in the human rights field and in the field of humanitarian action: How can we translate the reality, the often grim and unspeakable reality, that exists in places like Rwanda and Darfur? There are many other places that I can put on this list, unfortunately. How can one convey that reality to policymakers and to decision makers, to those who are in a position to mitigate the suffering of the downtrodden and oppressed?

Speaking briefly of the prevention of genocide, I would like to, on the one hand, speak to the tremendous importance of information, of knowledge and of having an accurate understanding of realities on the ground. But



I would like to urge a note of caution that information that is not acted upon is not going to bring about the changes that need to be brought about. So one also has to look at the question broadly of advocacy and of how that message is ultimately communicated to appeal to the various stakeholders with the means to make a difference.

The prevention and punishment of genocide, I believe, goes to the very basis of the United Nations as it was created and conceived in 1945. Historians have called the 20th century the century of genocide. It began in 1915 with the mass killings and deportations of some one and a

half million Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. It reached its apothéosis in the Second World War in the Holocaust with the extermination of some six million Jews and Gypsies and others deemed to be undesirable races. It was in the wake of that unprecedented calamity that the United Nations adopted in 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. The vow “never again to allow such atrocities to be committed” has become “ever again”, as one could discuss by way of example: Idi Amin’s Uganda; Mengistu’s Ethiopia; Cambodia’s killing fields under Khmer Rouge; and the list goes on and on – Bosnia, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and today in the opening years of the 21st century, Darfur.

Given the fact that the crime of genocide – the intentional collective destruction of entire human groups by virtue of their identity – is fundamental to the legitimacy of the United Nations, we have to take stock of what has been achieved so far and how we need to re-conceptualize our understanding of this problem in order to make meaningful progress.

I would like to suggest that there are some promising signs. The first promising sign is the emergence of a culture of accountability for mass atrocities in the establishment in 1993 of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and subsequently in 1994 the International Tribunal for Rwanda. Now today we have a functioning International Criminal Court, which is addressing crimes against humanity in places such as the DRC and Uganda.

This is a highly significant development when measured against the sorry standards that prevailed until the 1990s. By way of example, we are all familiar with the crimes of the Khmer Rouge, which between 1975 and 1979 claimed the lives of approximately two million people in Cambodia. At that time the Khmer Rouge was denounced as a violator of human rights until a Vietnamese-backed invasion of Cambodia made the Khmer Rouge a useful military bulwark against the Vietnamese influence in the region. And as is often the case, geopolitics trumped human rights concerns. The Khmer Rouge based in refugee camps in Thailand was actively rehabilitated politically, and armed and trained militarily. And in 1993 in UN-sponsored elections in Cambodia the Khmer Rouge was a legitimate political party. One can only imagine if after the Second World War there were UN-sponsored elections in Germany in which the Nazi party was a legitimate party.



This culture of cynicism and culture of impunity perhaps explains why humanitarianism is always at the periphery, always at the margins; why human rights and humanitarianism are very often dismissed as naïve idealism in the face of power realities; and why when we are dealing with issues such as genocide, the issue is often dealt with as if genocide were an earthquake or tsunami which is going to be resolved by the delivery of humanitarian assistance as opposed to dealing with the root causes that create a deluge in which millions drown and people such as yourselves – brave as you are working in the humanitarian field with such limited resources, such limited political backing – have to save the multitude from drowning rather than having the means of dealing with the root causes that created the deluge in the first place.

And perhaps this is the first point that I think we need to make as we move away from a reactive culture to a culture of prevention. Another hopeful sign is the appointment in 2004 of a United Nations Special Advisor of Prevention of Genocide by the United Nations Secretary-General at that time, Kofi Annan. Juan Méndez, a very prominent Argentine human rights activist, was appointed as the first Special Advisor and recently Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed Francis Deng from Sudan, whom many of you will know through his work on displaced persons, as the new Special Advisor.

Moving away from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention requires first and foremost the realization that genocide is not a natural disaster. Genocide is not an earthquake, it is not a tsunami, it is not a god-given reality, it is not an inescapable fact of history, a clash of civilizations, or some spontaneous outburst of primordial hatred, as many people would have us believe. Genocide and crimes against humanity are above all a political choice. They are instruments by which ruthless leaders wield power. And as such, genocide can be predicted and therefore prevented.

The prediction of genocide cannot always take place with mathematical exactitude or scientific accuracy. But there are ingredients, ingredients that can demonstrate that a situation could potentially escalate into genocidal violence. The time to act is not when a humanitarian disaster is already on the agenda of the Security Council or in CNN Headline News. The time to act is when no one has even begun to speak about a particular situation. The time to act in Rwanda was before April 1994. The time to act in Darfur was before the summer of 2004. And this is the profound shift in the culture of decision-making that

we all have to contribute to in order to reformulate the discourse about humanitarianism. This is not to say that those of you who are involved in providing relief for the existing disasters should cease to do what you are doing. But we need to start thinking in terms of prevention as a long-term objective of changing the culture and habits of decision makers. I believe that the most important changes which need to be made are in the United Nations system.

I did a report two years ago on the work of the Office of the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide, for which I interviewed a number of senior decision makers within the United Nations system, whether from the Secretariat, whether from missions to the United Nations and otherwise. And I found that while there was broad support for the idea of prevention, there was little appreciation of the practical realities of what prevention really entails.

So on the one hand while we believe that the idea of prevention of genocide is welcomed, when it comes to Sudan, for example, there was extreme reluctance to do anything prior to the escalation of what was essentially a manageable, low-intensity, guerilla war in Darfur. Prior to its escalation into inter-ethnic cleansing, the thinking was, “Well, we don’t want to destabilize the North-South peace process so we are going to engage in wishful thinking and hope that the escalation of the conflict in Darfur will simply not happen”. I would say that that is hardly a realistic view of the world, never mind naïve idealism. Given the record of that Government in the South over two decades, how could one imagine that the conflict would go in any other way than what we see today?

The ingredients of genocide, while each situation is unique, are quite common: incitement to hatred; the use of state propaganda to demonize particular ethnic, racial or religious groups, which is very often linked with political radicalization along ethnic lines; the definition of political platforms in exclusive violent terms based on identity; the distribution of weapons to extremist groups; the preparations of lists of those to be exterminated very often through the issuing of identity cards like those that existed in Rwanda, which allowed the genocidaires to determine who was a Hutu and who was a Tutsi. And if I may say, as politically incorrect as it may seem, although I am sure this is not the intention of the Government in Ethiopia, we should be aware that a similar system exists in Ethiopia, which if circumstances deteriorated, would give a basis for ethnic identity to easily be determined.

Now let's think in concrete terms about what could have been done. Let's look at the disasters that we have come to understand as historical facts to see how the outcome could have been different. And I always look at the case of Rwanda because Rwanda teaches us that even if you have all the information, all the knowledge and analysis that is required, if there is no political will, nothing will change. At least a year before the Rwanda genocide in 1994, the UN Special Rapporteur on Arbitrary Executions issued a report where he spoke about inter-communal massacres or more directly massacres by Hutu extremists against the Tutsi minority which had actually begun as early as 1990, and he spoke about the potential for massive violence against the Tutsis.

In January of 1994 the head of the UN Assistance Mission in Rwanda, General Roméo Dallaire, who I am sure many of you have heard about – you may have seen his documentary “Shaking Hands with the Devil” which is an account of how the United Nations abandoned the people of Rwanda in 1994 – sent this famous-by-now “genocide fax” to the Department of Peacekeeping in New York indicating that informants had advised him that Hutu extremists wanted to sabotage the Arusha Peace Accords, which was a power-sharing scheme for Hutus and Tutsis; that Hutu extremists were preparing lists of Tutsis to be exterminated; and that the Interahamwe militia, which had infiltrated every town in Rwanda, were being given weapons in order to execute this diabolical design. The response at that time by actors was basically to stand down. The request of Roméo Dallaire to enhance the mandate of his peacekeeping mission, to confiscate weapons, and to confront the extremists was met with deafening silence: “This is not part of your mandate”; and another exercise of wishful thinking, “We will just hope that nothing happens”.

In April of 1994 when the genocide began, the only decisive response of the Security Council was to withdraw the vast majority of the 2,500 peacekeepers who were on the ground. And one of my dear friends – a survivor of the Rwanda genocide who lost 200 members of her family and fled miraculously with her three daughters by hiding in this famous Hotel Rwanda – explains what it was like for her with three little girls running in the streets trying to get the Belgium and French soldiers who were sent to evacuate expatriates to take her daughters. They took the dogs and cats of the expatriates but not her children.

So these are the realities that we have to look at. What could have been done differently in Rwanda? Consider

the role of the infamous RTLM Radio, which was otherwise known as “radio death”. This radio station – the directors of which were recently prosecuted by the Rwanda Tribunal in Arusha for crime and incitement of genocide – incited people to hatred against the Tutsis over a prolonged period of several months. Tutsis were referred to as cockroaches to be exterminated. And we see this language in Nazi Germany with the Jews being referred to as rats, and the whole idea of infestation. The radio was the sole source of information for 70% of Rwanda's population who were illiterate, who lived in rural areas with no access to television, and who could not read newspapers. Imagine if the international community, instead parachuting 50,000 soldiers, which is the typical conception of intervention in times of crisis, imagine if that radio station had been jammed? How much would it have cost to jam a radio station in Rwanda which was absolutely instrumental for inciting hatred, for turning neighbour against neighbour, and even during the genocide issuing instructions that this Interahamwe cell should go to this neighbourhood to kill the following people, because that was the means of communication. There were no telephones and there were no walkie-talkies. So just imagine in that one instance how such a simple intervention could have had such far-reaching consequences.

One of the problems in beginning to see the world in terms of prevention is that it is not glamorous to be engaged in an activity where the measure of success is what does not happen. Our success has to be measured in what does not happen. And what does not happen does not make CNN Headline News and it does not result in Nobel peace prizes. But that is where our greatest challenge is.

I think we need to look at some of the success stories. Consider, for example, Macedonia, in which just 1,000 UN peacekeepers in a recent deployment possibly prevented what could have been yet another round of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia. We can never know with scientific certainty if that was to be the case, but I would say better safe than sorry.

Consider Burundi, which is a mirror of Rwanda in terms of its ethnic composition, its history, its tendency to violence, where the efforts of a former US diplomat in simply organizing a series of workshops in Nairobi that in a timely, focused and effective fashion engaged political and military leaders in a dialogue in which they were encouraged to look at their political contests in something

other than a zero-matrix context, in which the political moderates were mainstreamed at a time when extremists were trying to destabilize the situation. That intervention could very well have prevented the escalation of violence in Burundi into yet another mass killing similar in scale to that in Rwanda.

Once again we can sit here and debate whether the examples I have provided are examples of successful prevention or not. We will never, with any degree of certainty, be able to tell whether that would have been the case or not. But once again, our culture has to be one of over-abundance of caution and we need to think in terms of better safe than sorry, rather than in engaging in wishful thinking until we are at the precipice of a genocide, by which time it is too late to act, except than to engage in humanitarianism understood as mitigating the most extreme effects of disasters, rather than responding effectively to the root causes.

I am going to end simply by perhaps sharing a few words about how one conveys the reality of such situations to policymakers, to decision makers and to the public at large. Information flows are absolutely essential for providing early warning. I would encourage all of you to think about how information flows could ensure that the Office of the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide receives timely information. I think that all of us need to start familiarizing ourselves with the ingredients of genocide, with the early warning signs of genocide in ensuring that sort of information flow.

At the end of the day I think our role as advocates is the greatest challenge before us. The next incidences of crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing and genocide are before us today. Once again, at the risk of being politically incorrect, I will speak of the example of Ethiopia, which could very well go the way as the former Yugoslavia and disintegrate in ethnic cleansing. This is something that we have to accept as a possibility and we have to start engaging before the ethnic tensions that very clearly exist in that society, escalate into an uncontrollable disaster. Burma, the plight of the Karen minority, and others – these are the future cases that we need to be engaged in now before they make newspaper headlines.

I am just going to end by saying that moving to a culture of prevention requires tremendous imagination. We ultimately will always fall back on what we know from human experience. We will look back at Rwanda and Darfur. We will not look forward to Burma and Ethiopia

and what could or could not happen there in the coming years. So we need to start conceptualizing what prevention looks like. How do we measure success in terms of prevention? This reminds me of my five-year-old niece who was drawing something on a piece of paper, and I asked her what she was drawing. She said, “I am drawing God”. I said, “Nobody knows what God looks like”, and she said, “You will after I finish drawing him”. So we need to begin to construct an image of what it means to shift to a preventive culture. How will the decision-making process and best practices have to change in order to allow us to move there? But most important is inducing the will to act and awakening the shared humanity without which all the knowledge and analysis in the world will not result in action if there are no pressing national interests.

Nicholas Kristof wrote an opinion editorial in the New York Times recently called “Save the Darfur Puppy”. It was a very intriguing opinion. He explained that the crime of genocide, ethnic cleansing or massive atrocities are so great that ordinary people, and I would dare say policymakers, very often simply don’t know how to respond. They are overwhelming realities. “We are more likely to respond to a puppy in distress”, he wrote, “a puppy stuck in a tree”, than we are to an incident of ethnic cleansing halfway across the world. Josef Stalin famously remarked that a single death is a tragedy, whereas the murder of millions is a mere statistic. We need to start understanding that without empathy, without conveying the realities of these situations, we are ultimately not going to be successful. At the recent Global Conference on the Prevention of Genocide, which I had the privilege of chairing at McGill University, we began with the stories of survivors. We had survivors from the Holocaust, from Cambodia, from Rwanda, from Darfur who impressed upon the very distinguished audience that behind every victim is a name. Behind every victim is a face, is a universe of human emotions and relations. And until those with a means to make a difference appreciate that reality, I am afraid we will be stuck indefinitely in this culture of reaction with humanitarianism at the periphery.

Thank you very much for your attention.



# Annex D – Working Group Summaries

## Working Group 1

### Protection Information

**Facilitator: Jenny McAvoy, OCHA**

**Working Group 1 examined the challenges of protection and human security in humanitarian operations, focusing on how protection-related information can be shared more effectively and efficiently.**

Central to the discussions was IM's role in protection-related decision-making at operational stages from response and remedial activities to environment-building, and at levels from programming and advocacy to policymaking. A key objective would be to tailor information to specific decision-making needs.

Participants identified the overall need to bridge the gap between information-gathering and analysis. The gap results partly due to a lack of clarity over the intended purpose and desired output of information collected, with heavy dependence on anecdotal and qualitative forms. Even when quantitative information is collected, ad hoc planning or lack of IM expertise can limit its credibility and applicability for analytical purposes. This could be addressed by building decision-making needs into planning of information systems, by including an inventory of existing tools and systems at an early stage, and by ensuring adaptability of tools and systems as contexts and operations evolve.

A related discussion point was how to ensure objectivity in identification of trends and production of analyses. Participants emphasized the importance of avoiding biased approaches and suggested a contextual analysis - especially analyses of threats faced by civilians - at the outset of assessment processes can reduce the prevalence of assumptions and lead to better prioritization, especially in multi-sectoral settings. It was also agreed that common mechanisms, protocols or SOPs for collecting and sharing sensitive protection information would help preserve the

confidentiality of sources. It was emphasized that the least harmful and invasive means should be used during all IM activities.

Another key issue identified was the need to collect a diversity of protection information to meet various needs, and to ensure cross-cluster information-sharing. This includes not only information drawn from the range of clusters to inform analyses by the protection lead agency, but also provision of information to other clusters holding protection responsibilities. The necessity of such multi-dimensional exchanges not only underscores the importance of involving IM specialists at the earliest stages, but also of an engaged leadership. The HC's role in defining and coordinating IM needs was considered paramount regardless of inter-agency coordination arrangements. Participants agreed that protection cluster leads and other agencies tasked with IM must be supported with resources to fulfil leadership requirements. A proposed taxonomy of protection information systems was reviewed and it was agreed that the Global Protection Cluster Working Group should further develop it and encourage its use as an IM planning reference.

Participants agreed that while national authorities are responsible for the well-being of conflict-affected populations, exchange of information and analysis on protection needs can be affected where authorities are themselves party to a conflict. This issue should be continually revisited to ensure opportunities are not missed.

Recommendations from this working group are available online:  
[http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/11\\_presentations/presentation1.html](http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/11_presentations/presentation1.html)

## Working Group 2

# Humanitarian Information Exchange in the Field

**Facilitator: Kathleen Miner, OFDA**

**Working Group 2 focused on information-sharing by organizations operating within humanitarian situations in field**

**locations.** It focused on four key areas: Integration of IM into the Humanitarian Reform process; Data gathering, assessments, classification and analysis; IM professionalism; Training, contingency planning, and preparedness. There was consensus that institutional roles, responsibilities and SOPs for IM must be integrated into the Humanitarian Reform Process, including clear IM and analysis responsibility both within each cluster and at head-of-cluster level.

Participants agreed that existing IM policy and guidance materials - such as relevant IASC documents, SOPs and Terms of References - could already provide direction for IM integration in the humanitarian reform process. However, the multiplicity of tools, checklists, and SOPs used by various agencies should be consolidated and linked into a more interoperable and unified system. Areas such as information flow, gathering, analysis, and dissemination were identified as needing further guidance development. Recognizing the importance of senior management endorsement of IM to increase organizational buy-in, participants discussed the importance of the Emergency Relief Coordinator's role in placing IM at a high priority within emergency response. They also raised the need to identify and ensure appropriate IM financing and staffing structures within clusters and to create IM Terms of Reference for clusters and the UNDAC team.

The second discussion area focused on the challenge of producing timely, accurate, relevant and objective analysis through IM practices which are often undertaken with insufficient consistency and lack the necessary strategic or operational focus required by decisions-makers. Participants agreed that the resulting inefficiencies, gaps, duplications, delays and poor targeting could be

addressed by a number of existing IM initiatives. Among those discussed were the Common Humanitarian Classification System (CHCS) and the Integrated Food Security and Humanitarian Phase Classification (IPC). A one-page collaborative multi-agency Field Assessment Summary Template (FAST) was also discussed. There was agreement that the wider humanitarian community be consulted on the desirability and feasibility of these tools before further development of prototypes.

As part of discussions on IM professionalism and training, participants stressed the importance of identifying roles and responsibilities for promoting the use of interoperable data-gathering methods and formats, and providing unhindered access to primary data, methodologies and metadata, while at the same time protecting sensitive information. Participants discussed establishing and strengthening normative systems within clusters and agreed that the IASC should take the lead in developing and enforcing global minimum IM standards and developing common training guidelines for IM professionals.

Discussion points relating to contingency planning and preparedness addressed the need to establish relationships with national and local institutions to build on existing systems, and to integrate IM preparedness into IASC guidelines. Also discussed was the need for research, exploration and documentation of best practices from other disciplines.

Recommendations from this working group are available online:

[http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/11\\_presentations/presentation1.html](http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/11_presentations/presentation1.html)

## Working Group 3

### Humanitarian Financing Supported by Information and Analysis

**Facilitator: Sue Lautze, The Livelihoods Program**

**Working Group 3 reviewed the role of information in supporting the effective mobilization of resources from a wide range of sources needed to provide appropriate and impartial humanitarian assistance to populations coping with crises and disasters.**

The group looked at the information needed to facilitate strategic and operational decision-making by affected and donor governments, philanthropic organizations and others. It also looked at how exchange of finance-related information among humanitarian organizations can be promoted by all actors. Overall, there was consensus on the need for better coordinated, more timely and reliable information-sharing for humanitarian financing.

There was overall agreement on the need for quality information on which to base funding decisions and the tensions that arise with the financing of rapid humanitarian action based on initial assessments. Participants looked at the need to link information and financing via “staged assessments” that facilitate immediate release of funds for rapid response. They recognized the importance of improved capacity, and collaboration with / trust of national authorities and beneficiaries in joint assessments. They also discussed some of the barriers to use of common information tools. The IPC (Integrated Food Security and Humanitarian Phase Classification) was highlighted as a useful tool to support funding decisions.

The group debated the issue that assessments are not always perceived to be objective or independent from fund-raising processes. Systematic use of agreed standards and indicators improves trust and credibility between international and national stakeholders. All agreed that interpretations of existing standards differ

between the various humanitarian organizations, and it would be important to streamline approaches through consolidation of guidelines and sharing of formats. Participants also raised the question of whether standards represent aspirations or minimum levels and discussed the importance of upholding standards for maximizing accountability.

Participants noted that the UN needs to better understand the various strategic information needs of humanitarian financiers. Some participants highlighted the utility of the Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) for recognizing gaps and undertaking rapid decision-making. Some also expressed a preference for informal meetings and networks over the Financial Tracking System (FTS), which was viewed as incomplete, not always capturing NGO or affected government contributions.

Ultimately, participants emphasized that despite the different initiatives and agreements, there are still barriers to sharing finance-related information, particularly at field level. Humanitarian financing decisions are influenced by relationships of trust, including the reliability of information sources. There should be more coordination and information-sharing among donors, at the global and country levels, to remove duplication and avoid gaps. It was also noted that the Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative is not yet an adequate tool for this.

Recommendations from this working group are available online:

[http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/11\\_presentations/presentation1.html](http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/11_presentations/presentation1.html)



## Working Group 4

### Innovation to Improve Humanitarian Action

**Facilitator: Bartel Van de Walle, Tilburg University/ ISCRAM**

**W**orking Group 4 examined the potential of emerging technologies and approaches to strengthen information-sharing, coordination and decision-making. The majority of the discussion focused on the pace of innovation in information technology (IT) and its effect on humanitarian response performance.

One area of common concern addressed by participants was preparedness and testing of new technologies in the field. Constant efforts for preparedness of personnel, systems, infrastructure and data are necessary to ensure effective and timely response while allowing for innovation. However, the introduction of new technologies and information systems can be effected taking into account user familiarity with existing systems. Participants agreed that a critical component of preparedness would be to establish a well-funded and sustainable data/information infrastructure.

Participants noted that innovation is often the product of unpredictable developments arising from a multiplicity of approaches. Unless standards already exist and are accepted and implemented by a wide ambit of the humanitarian community, innovation can often be succeeded by a lack of interoperability, which creates inefficiencies and raises costs. In the absence of formal or appropriate standards, de facto standards are adopted or fixes are built to bridge disparate standards. New standards can be developed from the grass roots, increasing value and suitability for local needs. Complementary standards can simultaneously be introduced from the top, amplifying access, use, and integration, and streamlining information flows.

The group also discussed training and education of IM professionals, agreeing that many staff deployed to the field are volunteers and lack professional background or sufficient knowledge of standards and best practices. In

addition, high staff turnover has resulted in the loss of IT-related knowledge and institutional memory. Building a stable organizational IT knowledge base is therefore another priority. It was agreed that humanitarian IM could be significantly professionalized by incorporating a number of well-established management practices used by the IT industry. However, it was noted that these practices need to be adapted to the stressful and time-critical nature of emergency environments.

Another priority highlighted was to ensure the necessary field capacity to understand and use existing tools and systems. First it would be necessary to make an inventory of the diverse systems being used and create an accurate classification of the range of technologies that can be applied to humanitarian response. Participants also noted that innovation can be fostered through greater links with the public and academic forums. The value of private/public and academic partnerships should be clear to all stakeholders, including the risks that these partnerships may bring. In conclusion, participants agreed the next step should be an OCHA-convened conference focusing on "Innovation in the humanitarian context".

Recommendations from this working group are available online:  
[http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/11\\_presentations/presentation1.html](http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/11_presentations/presentation1.html)

## Working Group 5

### Communications to Affected Communities in Crises

**Facilitator: Imogen Wall, BBC Trust**

**Working Group 5 looked at the information needs of affected populations both during emergencies and in longer-term recovery efforts.** Its aim was to consider strategies to integrate communications with beneficiaries into the humanitarian response framework, particularly through opportunities offered by the current reform process. There was consensus that information can be a lifesaving commodity that is too often misunderstood as a question of public relations for individual agencies.

When disasters strike, decisions have to be made with affected communities in mind. Participants noted the importance of identifying key audiences, such as practitioners, marginalized and isolated groups, children, women, nomadic and displaced persons, including parties on all 'sides' of a conflict. The psychosocial value of media access was emphasized in looking at the issue of information wants versus needs, and therefore the mode of delivery to affected communities is critical.

It was agreed that the focus should be on downwards accountability and two-way communication with, rather than to, beneficiaries. This increases the channels for expression of need and also enables the international community to draw on local capabilities. Of great importance is the need to build capacity of local, independent and mainstream media, and to engage available resources, particularly local government and national organizations. However, due to the generally poor level of understanding of communications with affected communities, mainstreaming this approach within the humanitarian architecture, particularly the cluster system, is vital, as is ensuring longer-term financing by further engaging donors. Outside expertise, engaging the private sector, also needs to be integrated.

Ensuring communications are two-way and collecting and

incorporating information from affected communities in a dynamic and shifting environment can be major challenges. Separating the functions of Public Information and Communications officers is an important measure for acknowledging the different expectations and expertise of each role in meeting these challenges. Participants emphasized the need to put the right communications officers in emergency situations with the right materials and tools, including IT, and the right balance of relief and communications officers. Experience has shown that successful mobilization of affected communities can lead to more efficient response. Participants cited the cluster approach in Pakistan as a clear example of a lesson learned.

Participants agreed that accountability for this approach is best achieved through impact assessments and evaluations. All agreed that the most effective responses implement actions that have been field-tested before roll-out. Similarly, it is important to operate standardized messaging, to work with existing systems and to stockpile equipment for preparedness. Participants stressed the need to work with communities and governments, particularly during the preparedness phase.

The group emphasized that communications with affected communities should to be placed permanently on the IASC agenda, possibly through the creation of a sub-working group. The IASC contingency planning guidelines should be further revised to incorporate communications with beneficiaries. Participants also noted the need to undertake comprehensive mapping/research on best practices, to establish communications capacities within clusters, and to reach collective agreements with the international community to build training and surge rosters. Finally, there was a need to convene meetings of heads of national disaster agencies to mobilize support for communications with affected communities.

Recommendations from this working group are available online:  
[http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/11\\_presentations/presentation1.html](http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/11_presentations/presentation1.html)

# Annex E – Panel Summaries

## Panel 1

### What information is needed to address the challenges presented by today's humanitarian environment?

**T**he panel acknowledged the change in size and dynamics of the humanitarian business over the last 10 years, its increasingly political dimensions and the power of information, especially when used as a basis for analysis, making it more action-oriented.

There was agreement that activating information through analysis requires the involvement of affected communities in a two-way flow. The use of cellphones, livelihoods analysis, participatory impact assessment all point toward this direction. Also recognized were the risks to protection responsibilities of attributing data and information to individuals in vulnerable situations, and also the importance of balancing standards and regulations with flexibility and the tailoring of a product or operation to its context. The increasing role of the Islamic world in humanitarian efforts was also discussed.

**PETER WALKER, Moderator**

**Director, Feinstein International Center, Tufts University**

Peter is Irwin H. Rosenberg Professor of Nutrition and Human Security and Director of the Feinstein International Center at Tufts University. Active in development and disaster response since 1979, he has worked for a number of British-based NGOs in several African countries. He was Director of Disaster Policy for 10 years at the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) before moving to Bangkok as head of IFRC's regional programs for Southeast Asia.

**BINETA DIOP**

**Director, Femmes Africa Solidarité**

Bineta is founder and Executive Director of Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), an NGO based in Geneva and Dakar. As FAS Executive Director she helped initiate the West African women's movement, the Mano River Women's Peace Network which was awarded a UN Prize in the field of Human Rights in 2003. Bineta is Vice-President of the African Union Women's Committee, and she also chairs the Geneva-based UN Working Group on Peace, which is part of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women.

## Panel 1 – Humanitarian Realities



## JEMILAH MAHMOOD

### President, MERCY Malaysia

Jemilah is the founder and President of MERCY Malaysia, a Malaysian-born and now international NGO that operates in 14 countries. She is also Chair of the Asian Disaster Reduction & Response Network, Vice-Chair of the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), and a member of both the Advisory Group of the UN Central Emergency Response Fund and the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination team.

## DAVID NABARRO

### System Coordinator for Avian and Human Influenza

David is the Senior UN System Coordinator for Avian and Human Influenza, on secondment from the World Health Organization since September 2005. A physician and public health specialist, David has taught at medical schools in London and Liverpool, worked for the UK National Health Service, for child health programmes in Nepal, for Save the Children in South Asia, as well as with the British Overseas Development Administration/ Department for International Development (DFID).

## DAVID SHEARER

### UN Deputy Special Representative for Iraq

David was appointed the Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (Humanitarian, Reconstruction and Development) in August 2007. In addition to serving as UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq, David has extensive experience leading UN humanitarian operations in the Middle East, South Asia, Eastern Europe and Africa. He has also conducted various assignments with the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Save the Children and the International Crisis Group.

## Panel 2

### What are the changing information needs of decision makers to meet the challenges posed by the humanitarian reform?

**W**hether integrating information across or within clusters, reliable and well-managed information is critical to decision makers for coordination, assessing needs, analyzing gaps and setting priorities for both strategic and operational purposes, as well as for resource mobilization. Four senior decision makers comprising a representative of an affected government, a donor, a seasoned Humanitarian Coordinator, and the head of a UN agency in a disaster-affected country discussed their main challenges in decision-making. They found that the cluster approach has improved decision-making by allowing better use of available resources and prioritizing needs. Clusters have provided stronger clarity and certainty about who is responsible in each sector of activity. The approach has worked well by adopting a flexible approach to meet needs in the field and to support existing government structures and capacities. Among the challenges highlighted was IM coordination by cluster leads across their partner agencies.

**NAN BUZARD, Moderator**  
**Director of International Programs and Operations, American Red Cross**

Nan is Senior Director of International Programs and Operations at the American Red Cross. Previously she worked for UNHCR's Emergency Service on security and emergency response policy and practice in refugee operations worldwide. From 1998-2003 Nan directed the Sphere Project, an NGO/Red Cross initiative to develop common standards in humanitarian work through the handbook Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response.

**BO ASPLUND**  
**UN Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan**

Before his appointment to Afghanistan in August 2007, Bo was Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator and the UNDP Resident Representative in Indonesia, a post he held since 2001. He has served in similar posts in Sudan and Algeria. He was Deputy Assistant Administrator of UNDP's Regional Bureau for Arab States in New York. Earlier in his career, Bo held positions with the Swedish Government, including diplomatic postings to Chile and to the Swedish Mission to the UN.

**PAULO ZUCULA**  
**Director of Mozambique's Disasters Management Institute**

For the past year Paulo has served as National Director of Mozambique's Disasters Management Institute. Before that he worked as Spatial Development Initiative Coordinator for SADC countries under the Development Bank of Southern Africa, and as Chief Technical Advisor

to the Forestry and Wildlife Management Project in Mozambique funded by the African Development Bank. He has also worked for FAO and was Mozambique's Vice-Minister of Agriculture for three years.

**LEILA GHARAGOZLOO-PAKKALA**  
**UNICEF Representative, Mozambique**

Leila has been serving as UNICEF Representative in Mozambique since December 2004. Prior to this posting, Ms. Pakkala worked for UNICEF in Somalia, New York, Macedonia and Uganda, and for the UN in Ethiopia and Lesotho. She has worked extensively in both development and humanitarian contexts, and also in the private sector and as a professional counselor in Lesotho.

**JOHAN HEFFINCK**  
**European Commission Senior Expert, Kenya**

Johan is a medical doctor and Master in Public Health, who has spent most of his 24-year career in Africa in different capacities. He has worked extensively in the NGO community (MSF), mostly in crisis situations. He has contributed for years through the UN and EC to rehabilitation efforts in Liberia, and since 1999 has been based in Nairobi for ECHO as head of its Sector Support Team.





## Panel 3

### What will our humanitarian future look like and what role will information play in supporting it?

**T**he way information is being gathered, shared and communicated is transforming the humanitarian environment. Panelists maintained that in the future we can expect a greater flow of information from non-traditional media actors using social networking tools, such as YouTube and SecondLife, which will democratize communication and empower victims. For the humanitarian community these new information sources, coupled with dramatic advances in communications technology, will lead to improvements in aid response efforts and make it harder for crises or human rights violations to take place unnoticed. A new generation of GPS and Internet-ready mobile phones and expanded networks will offer great opportunities for gathering and sharing information for aid workers, as well as those affected by humanitarian crises. Two opportunities particularly stand out: collective information systems may provide new solutions to information-gathering and analysis, while options to communicate globally in an inexpensive, virtual and low-carbon way are emerging rapidly.

#### **JAMES DARCY, Moderator** **Director, Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute (ODI)**

James is ODI's Director of Humanitarian Policy Group. After training in commercial and, subsequently, human rights law, he worked for 10 years with Oxfam GB in Central Africa, Eastern Europe and South and East Asia. He played a lead role in the conception of the Sphere Humanitarian Charter, has led a number of evaluations of UN and other programmes, and chairs an external advisory group to WFP on needs assessment.

#### **SANJANA YAJITHA HATTOTUWA** **Senior Advisor, ICT4Peace Foundation**

Sanjana is a Senior Advisor to the ICT4Peace Foundation, working to raise awareness of the use of ICT in conflict management. He is Senior Researcher at the Centre for Policy Alternatives and Head of ICT and Peacebuilding at InfoShare, both based in Colombo. Sanjana is also Fellow of the Center for Information Technology and Dispute Resolution at the University of Massachusetts and founding board member of the Carebridge Foundation that specializes in technical assistance for humanitarian work.

#### **ANURADHA VITTACHI** **Co-founder, OneWorld**

Anuradha is Co-founder of the OneWorld Network and Co-director of OneWorld UK, in addition to being actively engaged in the development of OneClimate. She has made television documentaries, edited New Internationalist magazine, and written and contributed to various titles, including "Earth Conference One" about global survival and 'Electronic Empires', focusing on the impact of new media on global social relations.

#### **RIMA QURESHI** **Head, Ericsson Response**

Rima is Vice President and Head of Customer Support of Global Services at Ericsson in Sweden. She is also Head of Ericsson Response, a non-profit, global initiative formed in 2000 that focuses on disaster relief, drawing upon Ericsson's core knowledge and expertise to provide assistance in setting up telecommunications systems to help provide quicker relief during emergencies.

**SAMI ZEIDAN**  
**Presenter, Al Jazeera**

Sami is an award-winning journalist who, for more than a decade, has anchored, reported and executive-produced with some of the biggest names in television. Prior to joining Al Jazeera International, he presented a number of shows broadcast on CNBC Arabia, CNBC Europe, CNBC Asia, as well as on CNN International. He has also taught broadcast journalism courses at the University of Missouri-Columbia School of Journalism.



## Panel 4

### What is the impact of new media in humanitarian reporting and advocacy?

**W**ithin minutes of a disaster or conflict, the first images are seen on YouTube rather than CNN, and probably to a larger audience. New media and techniques for using it, e.g., blogging, are bringing wars, disasters and their humanitarian consequences to the attention of the public, government and aid agencies more efficiently than ever. Panelists from the blogosphere, media and humanitarian community considered whether “citizen journalism” and innovative approaches to advocacy are improving humanitarian response, whether the principles of information management and good journalism are at risk and reviewed how the humanitarian community is faring in this new environment. All agreed that new technology offers enormous potential but has a long way to go, especially in many crisis-affected countries where connectivity and access to technology are limited. Overall, it was acknowledged that new media is very powerful, enabling information to be delivered directly to users via e-mail, Internet or mobile phone. It can also be cost-effective, reach new audiences and allow the humanitarian community to set the agenda.



### **MARTYN BROUGHTON, Moderator** **Editor, AlertNet**

Martyn joined Reuters AlertNet in November 2006. He came from the aid agency Médecins Sans Frontières, where he spent more than six years as Head of Communications for MSF UK. Before that, Martyn worked for more than 20 years with BBC World Service Radio as a producer and editor of current affairs and feature programmes. He also worked with the BBC's Arabic language service and had a particular interest in the Middle East and Africa.

### **ARIELA BLATTER** **Director, Crisis Prevention and Response Center, Amnesty**

Ariela is an international human rights lawyer and founding Director of the Crisis Prevention and Response Center at Amnesty International. In this role she has directed strategic operations on crises in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. Since 2005, she has been involved in a project using satellite imagery as a global human-rights detection system for mass violations and genocide. Most recently, she launched the widely acclaimed "Eyes on Darfur" project ([www.eyesondarfur.org](http://www.eyesondarfur.org)).

### **BEN PARKER** **Editor-in-Chief, Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)**

Ben has worked in media, information and humanitarian issues since 1989, mainly for UN agencies in Africa, but also as a freelance writer and technology consultant. Co-founding IRIN in 1995, he set up the initial editorial

and technology systems, and subsequently worked for Africa Online. As a UN communications officer in Sudan 2003-2006, he released some of the first widely available photos and TV footage of Darfur. After a brief stint at ECHO, he returned to IRIN as global Editor-in-Chief in late 2006.

### **NEHA VISWANATHAN** **South Asia Editor, Global Voices**

Neha is regional editor for Global Voices Online, a non-profit global citizens' media project founded at Harvard Law School's Berkman Center for Internet and Society. She is also involved with the World Wide Help group which started as a response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004, helping people access information about the tsunami, and engaging them in relief efforts. Her work with World Wide Help also included use of new media to support rescue efforts and information access after Hurricane Katrina.

### **TARIK KAFALA** **Middle East Editor, BBC News Online**

Tarik edits Middle East coverage on the BBC News website. He has worked for the BBC since 1991, in radio, television and online formats ranging from news bulletins to documentaries. He has also reported from a number of countries in the region. Tarik has worked on the website for eight years, specializing in marrying technical developments to Web journalism. He has led a team of journalists working on Middle East news, reporting and reference material for the last four years.



# Annex F – Participation

Participation is listed by organization type as submitted during event registration.

## Chair

### Rusu, Sharon

Chief, External Relations and Support Mobilization Branch

## Keynote Speakers

### Akhavan, Payam

Professor of International Law, Chair of the Global Conference on the Prevention of Genocide, McGill University

### Holmes, John

UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs

### Prusak, Lawrence

Distinguished Scholar in Residence, Babson College, Founder and former Executive Director of the Institute for Knowledge Management

## Rapporteur

### King, Dennis

Humanitarian Analyst, US Department of State

## Panelists

### Panel 1. Humanitarian Realities

*What information is needed to address the challenges presented by today's humanitarian environment?*

#### Walker, Peter (Moderator)

Director, Feinstein International Center, Tufts University (USA)  
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#### Diop, Bineta

Director, Femmes Africa Solidarité (Switzerland)  
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#### Mahmood, Jemilah

President, MERCY Malaysia (Malaysia)  
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#### Nabarro, David

UN System Senior Coordinator For Avian And Human Influenza, UNDP (USA)  
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#### Shearer, David

UN Deputy Special Representative for Iraq, UNAMI (Jordan)  
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### Panel 2. Decision-making

*What are the changing information needs of decision makers to meet the challenges posed by the humanitarian reform?*

#### Buzard, Nan (Moderator)

Director of International Programs and Operations, American Red Cross (USA)  
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#### Asplund, Bo

UN Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan, UNDP (Afghanistan)  
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#### Gharagozloo-Pakkala, Leila

UNICEF Representative in Mozambique (Mozambique)  
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#### Heffinck, Johan

Senior Expert, Sector Policies, Head of Sector Support Team, European Commission (Kenya)  
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#### Zucula, Paulo

Director, National Disaster Management Institute (INGC) (Mozambique)  
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### Panel 3. Envisioning the Future

*What will our humanitarian future look like and what role will information play in supporting it?*

#### Darcy, James (Moderator)

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# Annex G – Working Glossary

## Analysis

The resolution or breaking up of anything complex into its various simple elements, the opposite process to synthesis; the exact determination of the elements or components of anything complex (with or without their physical separation).

*Oxford English Dictionary*

## Baseline

The “starting point” of existing information about a geographic area or situation prior to an emergency. This data is used to compare conditions after the onset of an emergency and determine the impact of the emergency.

*USAID/OFDA*

## Best practice

A technique or methodology that, through experience and research, has proven to reliably lead to a desired result. Best practices can also be defined as the most efficient and effective way of accomplishing a task, based on repeatable procedures that have proven themselves over time for large numbers of people.

*NASA*

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Best\\_practice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Best_practice)

## Collaboration

The process for capturing and sharing tacit knowledge through group interaction, shared expertise, and collective wisdom. Any cooperative effort between and among various individuals or organizations in order to achieve a common goal. A collaboration tool is something that helps people collaborate, including e-mail, video conferencing, instant relay messaging or chat, wikis, blogs, whiteboards, etc.

*Knowledge Management Dictionary*

## Collection

Those technical and non-technical activities that lead to the establishment of a body of data or information.

*OCHA*

## Community of Practice

Groups of people who share similar goals and interests. In pursuit of these goals and interests, they employ common practices, work with the same tools and express themselves in a common language. Through such common activity, they come to hold similar beliefs and value systems.

*Etienne Wenger*

## Data

Numbers, text, images or other method of recording in a form which can be understood by a human, entered into a computer for storage and processing, or transmitted on some digital channel. Note: Data on its own has no meaning; only once processed does data become meaningful information.

*FOLDOC*

## Dissemination

The last step of the IM chain, putting information products into the hands of policymakers and planners at various levels. Dissemination may be to a general audience or a targeted group of key decision makers, in a variety of formats and through a range of mechanisms.

*OCHA*

## Geographic Information System (GIS)

An organized collection of computer hardware, software and geographic data designed for capturing, storing, updating, manipulating, analyzing and displaying all forms of geographically referenced information.

*WebGIS.net Glossary*

## Information Management (IM)

The sum of all activities, collection, processing, organization and dissemination of information in order to help humanitarian actors achieve their goals in an effective and timely manner. Goals can include improved coordination, early warning, advocacy or transition.

*OCHA*

## Information Technology (IT)

The study, design, development, implementation, support or management of computer-based information systems, particularly software applications and computer hardware. IT deals with the use of electronic computers and computer software to convert, store, protect, process, transmit and retrieve information, securely. Recently the term has been broadened to explicitly include the field of electronic communication so that people tend to use the abbreviation ICT (Information and Communications Technology).

*Information Technology Association of America*  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information\\_and\\_Communications\\_Technology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_and_Communications_Technology)

## Interoperability

The ability to share information from a variety of sources in meaningful ways, both respecting the integrity of the source, and being able to integrate it and compare it with other sources.

*OCHA*

## Knowledge Management

The discipline that encompasses the principles, practices and technologies that can be used to leverage information and knowledge assets to achieve greater efficiency, effectiveness and innovation.

*Michael Stankosky, Ph.D George Washington University*

## Lesson learned

Knowledge or understanding gained by experience. The experience may be positive, as in a successful test or mission, or negative, as in a mishap or failure. A lesson must be significant in that it has a real or assumed impact on operations; valid in that it is factually and technically correct; and applicable in that it identifies a specific design, process or decision that reduces or eliminates the potential for failures and mishaps, or reinforces a positive result.

*NASA*

## Metadata

Data about data; information that characterizes data for documentation purposes. In essence, metadata answer who, what, when, where, why, and how about every facet of the data that are being documented.

*Glossary of Information Management and Related Terminology*

## Processing

Primarily technical processes that transform raw data (i.e. numbers) into a format that can be easily manipulated or combined with other data in preparation for further analysis. This includes activities such as “cleaning”, compiling from various sources, and using established storage and archiving structures.

*OCHA*

## Standard

Standards are yardsticks for measuring, among others, quality, performance and duration. Standards, in the context of humanitarian information, refer to a common framework for collaboration, performance, interoperability and coherence in the collection, processing, and dissemination of humanitarian information tools, products and analyses. They are, in addition, non-prescriptive, voluntary as to usage, derive from agreed best practice and are recognized as a mark of excellence amongst a community of practice.

*OCHA*

## Structured Humanitarian Assistance Reporting (SHARE)

A method for collecting, organizing, reporting, analyzing, and exchanging information critical to humanitarian assistance and economic recovery following major disasters. Its objective is to make operationally valuable information more readily available, especially to those involved in the chaotic initial phases of a humanitarian response.

*GIST*

<http://www.reliefweb.int/symposium/>

Information Exchange

Collaborating on Best Practices  
Humanitarian Information Network  
Humanitarian Information Management

- **Global Symposium +5, 22-26 Oct 2007, Geneva, Switzerland**
- Symposium, 5-8 Feb 2002

HIN Africa, 29-31 May 2006, Nairobi, Kenya

HIN Panama, 2-3 Aug 2005, Panama City, Panama

HIN Bangkok, 28-29 Nov 2003, Bangkok, Thailand

