

ICT4Peace: STRATEGIC USE OF ICTS IN CRISIS MANAGEMENT

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Statement of Martti Ahtisaari, former President of Finland

The ICT4Peace – International Process for Crisis Management is based on the Paragraph 36 of the WSIS Tunis Commitment. The Process was launched to implement that commitment and make it a reality in crisis management and peace operations in the field¹.

ICT4Peace will raise awareness about the contribution and potential of ICT in crisis management and foster exchange of best practices in the field of ICT for crisis management.

It will also enhance the competency of the international community in crisis management through improved interagency interoperability supported by practical collaborative frameworks and ICT tools.

I among the other persons who have been initiating this process believe that use of Information and Communication Technology can bring added value to the complexity. I firmly believe that ICT;

- provides access to critical, real-time information, crucial in timely and appropriate decision-making in crisis situations.
- enables Government of recipient countries to make well-informed decisions regarding allocation of resources and a means through which victims can give feedback regarding aid promised and received
- creates institutional memory of crisis management operations which are often characterised by a rapid turnover of staff
- improves the safety and security of all personnel in crisis areas
- improves situational awareness and creates opportunities for early-warning on threats

A major flaw in the International Community's approach to date has been to leave ICT and the issues enumerated above to IT departments without proper guidance on what we want to achieve.

It should be the leaders and the victims who decide what data and information we need. IT specialists need to facilitate these information and knowledge flows and not act as gatekeepers. I reiterate that the problem is not in technology per se but in organisation, leadership and resources.

¹ The process ICT4Peace: Strategic use of ICTs in Crisis management was initiated by the **ICT4Peace Foundation**, Geneva on 30 March 2007 (<http://www.ict4peace.org/articles/ICT4Peace%20Note%20-%20NY%20version.pdf>) in cooperation with the UN Global Alliance for ICT and Development, Crisis Management Initiative and several actors in the field of ICT and conflict management, humanitarian assistance and peacebuilding. A workshop was organized by the ICT4Peace Foundation with the support of the Swiss Ambassador to the UN on 15 November 2007 at the UN in New York with key leaders of the UN, Private sector, NGOs and Accademia to discuss the steps forward of this process.

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A key task is setting standards on how to determine the data needed, which can be exchanged easily. These standards have to be set with the help of the top level of the UN and it has become a senior leadership issue.

However, positive developments that can complement and strengthen this buy in from senior leadership at the UN can be seen in many different regions:

- within the African Union an early warning system is being created
- the lessons learned from Tsunami have started efforts across Asia in harnessing the ICT tools to protect citizens from natural disasters and provide more effective early warning and response mechanisms
- European Community's new Instrument for Stability features as one of the priority areas "Building capacity for effective crisis response." Under this, support will be channelled in "promoting the development and dissemination of suitable technologies to support the overall capacity-building objective of the programme." I find these steps very welcomed and complementary the efforts that we are aiming for with this ICT4Peace process.
- partnership between the ICT4Peace and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The OCHA **Global Symposium +5 'Information for Humanitarian Action'** in Geneva was a useful and valuable setting in addressing the issue on the changing humanitarian environment through effective information management.

I am a strong believer in the UN system and would welcome the appropriate UN agencies to stand up and take the leadership in these issues. This, to my mind, could be one important outcome of this process and a significant marker of the international community's commitment to the values and principles to save lives as embodied in the ICT4Peace process.

In support of the ICT4Peace process, I believe we need an ongoing dialogue process at the UN in New York once or twice a year with Governments and key actors from Business, Civil society and Academia to tackle the issues of information management, setting data and information management standards.