



ICT4Peace: “Strategic use of ICT for Crisis Management”¹ High-Level Working Lunch, 15th November 2007

The Permanent Representative of Switzerland hosted a High-Level working Lunch, on 15 November 2007. The event was sponsored by the ICT4Peace Foundation with the support of UN DESA Global Alliance for ICT and Development.

Summary

The question of how best to move forward on pre-existing commitments was at the forefront of discussion at the High-Level Working Lunch on the use of ICT for crisis management today, 15th November 2007. Focusing attention on implementation and action, participants noted the progress made thus far, highlighted at the recent OCHA Seminar in Geneva, and stressed the need to build on it. They emphasized the need to develop a set of common standards agreed by different agencies and organisations, both within and beyond the UN, to aid knowledge sharing and communication, and all expressed willingness to work together in order to bring about the changes needed. One significant obstacle was thought to be data security and the unwillingness to share information. The importance of creating a multi-stakeholder collaboration – encompassing both the private sector and those who collate and utilise ICT outputs in the field – was emphasised. It was emphasized that ICT can be used as a tool for progress in areas such as crisis management, humanitarian aid, development, peace building, peacekeeping and UN reform. Participants representing a range of national governments, NGOs and international organisations pledged their support to moving forward work in this field, especially via the initiative taken by the ICT4Peace Foundation, functioning as a Community of Expertise of the Global Alliance for ICT and Development. A key issue identified in the discussion was better information management among all stakeholders, and for that purpose the need for improved setting of common data standards, data sharing, cooperation and interoperability. The importance of the commitment and political will of senior leadership - from both international institutions and national governments - to the principles of ICT usage was seen as critical to success.

¹ 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 DESA Global Alliance for ICT and Development, The Crisis Management Initiative and several actors in the field of ICT and conflict management, humanitarian assistance and peace building.

President **Martti Ahtisaari** opened the meeting underlying that the ICT4Peace – International Process for Crisis Management is based on the Paragraph 36 of the WSIS Tunis Commitment, and added that the Process was launched to implement that commitment and make it a reality in crisis management and peace-keeping operations in the field.

He said that ICT4Peace aims at raising 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 also aims at enhancing the competency of the international community in crisis management through improved interagency interoperability supported by practical collaborative frameworks and ICT tools.

The use of ICT, he added, can bring added value to efforts to deal with complex issues, as it 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 of threats.

President Ahtisaari highlighted the fact that 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 were the key objectives to be achieved. It should be the leaders and the managers who decide what data and information was needed. IT specialists need to facilitate these information and knowledge flows and not act as gatekeepers. He reiterated that the problem is not in technology per se but in organisation, leadership and resource-management.

A key task is to set standards on how to determine the data needed, which can be exchanged easily. These standards, he said, have to be set with the help of the top level of the UN and this should be seen as 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 triggered 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.” These steps were welcomed and seen as complementary to the efforts for this ICT4Peace process.

- partnership between the ICT4Peace and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) was key. The OCHA **Global Symposium +5 ‘Information for Humanitarian Action’** in Geneva was a useful and valuable setting in addressing the issue in changing humanitarian environment through effective information management.

President Ahtisaari added that being a strong believer in the UN system, he would welcome the appropriate UN agencies to stand up and take the leadership in these issues. This would 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.

President Ahtisaari concluded his speech saying that the ICT4Peace process in order to be successful will need an ongoing dialogue process at the UN in New York once or twice a year with Governments and key actors to tackle the issues of information management, setting data and information management standards.

OCHA Director **Rashid Khalikov** welcomed the ICT4Peace initiative and said that OCHA and ICT4Peace shared the same goals, which included establishing and implementing best practice in the use of ICT and promoting new technologies for responding to humanitarian crises. The Global Symposium +5 Information for Humanitarian Action, held in Geneva in October, had confirmed principles established five years ago at the World Summit on the Information Society: Accessibility of ICT; inclusiveness by promoting collaboration and partnerships; the objectivity of those managing information; and the ability to collect and disseminate information quickly and efficiently. Mr. Khalikov spoke of the challenges which still exist to achieve these goals and stressed that collaboration beyond the UN – especially with NGOs – was necessary to their fulfillment. He emphasised that OCHA must participate in the process and take a leading role. Mr. Khalikov also underlined the importance of developing standards for information sharing and humanitarian action. He argued that there must be a common system for assessing the humanitarian situation on the ground.

H.E. Mr. **Igor N Scherbak**, First Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation, welcomed the ICT4Peace initiative and the work undertaken by OCHA in the field. He outlined a number of obstacles to the effective use of ICT tools in the UN system. He argued that information sharing faces three primary difficulties; cost, security and the need for the political will to share the information in the first place. Mr. Scherbak also highlighted the importance of the digital divide in relation to crisis management. Whilst communications infrastructure may be well-developed in some parts of the world, in regions most likely to require the help of crisis management tools, ICT infrastructure may be very poorly developed. This poses a problem for creating a harmonised approach to such situations. Mr. Scherbak concluded by expressing concern

about the potential use a terrorist might find for ICT and how one might mitigate this possible threat.

Drawing on the experience gained in his native Sri Lanka, Mr. **Sanjana Hattotuwa**, Special Adviser to the ICT4Peace Foundation, said that it was very difficult to communicate information which was obvious to those on the ground but not to those who did not work in the field. He said that he felt the institutions and conventions which are in place were not working: whilst they seem to suggest progress is being made, on the ground they are failing to provide tangible benefits. Mr. Hattotuwa described different cultural attitudes to sharing information and how the analysis of those who are not involved in the field can sometimes miss important factors in a crisis; the dissemination and significance of rumour within a local community, for example. Whilst standards are useful, he argued, the process of how one goes about collecting the information is crucial. The technology may be there, but the data collection mechanisms are missing.

Mr. Hattotuwa said: “My motivation for being involved in this initiative is an extremely personal one: I don’t want my nine-month-old son to have the same childhood that I experienced.... Billions and trillions of dollars are spent on ways for us to kill each other. What I’m interested in is how the technology that may have been developed for military purposes originally can now be used for human good.”

Assistant Secretary-General, Mr. **Soon-hong Choi**, the UN’s Chief Information Technology Officer, said this was a very timely initiative and wished to stress that the technology itself is very important: if the hardware and software is missing, no progress can be made. At present, he said, the many different parts of the UN system do not communicate efficiently, but this is an area under development. A strategic plan for the use of ICT in the Secretariat is in preparation in consultations with many UN agencies. The use of ICT for peace and security, humanitarian efforts, peacekeeping and development needs focus and attention, and consideration will be given to including these areas in the strategic plan. Mr. Choi added that the role of technology and its application for UN reform should not be overlooked.

Ms. **Alta Haqqarty**, speaking on behalf of OCHA, talked of the need to impress upon senior management the significance of technology and information management. This problem persisted despite the fact that the critical importance of leadership and governance was a significant feature of discussions at the Global Symposium in Geneva this year. Ms. Haqqarty said that whilst shared standards are important, what is really required is the political will, leadership and governance to make ICTs a relevant tool for activities such as crisis management and data sharing. She did, however, recognise that the latter issue was an extremely sensitive one at a political level, saying that in regard to information sharing, “we need to be careful, cautious and respectful of other issues.”

Mr. **Jean-Pierre Lacroix**, speaking on behalf of the Permanent Mission of France, while supporting the ICT4Peace initiative, was concerned with how ICT use affects the UN's peacekeeping work. He wanted to highlight in particular the importance of equal access to technology in this respect, arguing that having tools available in a local language was essential and that education and training – particularly for those in the field on UN peacekeeping missions – was also important for effective implementation.

Ms. **Angela Kane**, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, emphasised the importance of information architecture and good data analysis, arguing that technology should be at the heart of any dialogue on the UN's use of ICT: "It is the hardware and software which drives what is produced. We are encountering two problems in this regard: firstly that there is simply too much information and secondly the poor quality of some of the information produced." She stressed that the solution to this could be found in better design and use of new technologies.

H.E. Ambassador **Habib Mansour**, the Permanent Representative of Tunisia, welcomed the initiative and expressed his full support as host of the Tunis phase of the WSIS. He added that as the Representative of Tunisia he will work with the initiators of this initiative, the ICT4Peace Foundation and the Swiss Mission and the Global Alliance for ICT and Development, to promote and implement this important process.

H.E. Ambassador Mr. **Fernando Valenzuela**, representing the Delegation of the European Commission, underscored the importance of the issues being addressed by the ICT4Peace initiative. In this context, he discussed the transition period between a crisis situation and a return to stability. He said that it was crucial for departing international organisations to leave a solid foundation for capacity building in the localities which have experienced recent crisis.

Ms. **Catherine Pollard**, Chief of Staff at the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, talked of the centrality of information management to the department's work following its restructuring as part of the UN reform process. She stressed the importance of information gathering to the work of the DPKO because of the need to understand the situation on the ground and talked about the progress being made in this area thanks to an information management policy and committee. Ms. Pollard also highlighted the need for training in ICT for Peace and information management at all levels. She also underlined that DPKO is willing to work with other organizations and UN agencies to develop training modules.

Mr. **Yuki Karakawa**, of the International Association of Emergency Managers, said that stakeholders must coordinate, communicate and collaborate, yet trust and reliability are obstacles to this. The answer, Mr. Karakawa argued, lies in educating users about the potential of ICT.

Mr. **Michael Pereira** discussed his work as Director of Global Online Communities, of the Development Gateway Foundation. The organisation is creating online knowledge repositories; however Mr. Pereira said that this kind of information source was only part of the solution to data management. What was really needed, he argued, was to create an online resource which could be updated in real-time, bringing together the collective knowledge of various stakeholders in one place. The technology exists for this to happen, but the standards which facilitate this kind of information management were lacking, Mr. Pereira argued. He also said that he hoped that the ICT4Peace initiative will follow up on today's discussions.

Programme Director at Crisis Management Ms. **Kristiina Rintakoski** argued that whilst both the best practice guidelines and the technology exist, standardisation across different stakeholders remains an obstacle to effective use of ICT in crisis management situations. There is also an imbalance between data collection and data analysis, with the majority of time and effort being expended on the former, when the latter is equally – if not more – important.

Ms. **Patricia Thomson**, representing the United States Institute of Peace, said that engaging the private sector as partners in the creation and dissemination of technologies was key to the use of ICT for crisis management. The Institute is currently working on bringing together a number of private sector companies to discuss possibilities for collaboration in the near future.

Ms. **Helga Leifsdottir** pointed to the work of ReliefWeb, of which she is Coordinator, as evidence of the fact that initiatives already exist in the area of ICT and crisis management. She said that such projects could be strengthened if the requisite political will existed and if different stakeholders were more willing and able to share their knowledge.

Ms. **Deborah Saidy**, Director of the World Food Programme, talked about her experience of working in collaboration with OCHA and UNICEF on information management and ICT.

Summarising the discussions, H.E. Ambassador **Peter Maurer** said that the principles of best practice regarding the use of ICT in crisis management and other areas of the UN's work had been previously established, but their implementation was lacking. The obstacles to this lie in a paucity of collaboration between stakeholders, amongst other factors. Ambassador Maurer also highlighted the need to focus on how data collection and ICT tools worked on the ground, but the political will and governance of senior leadership was also key. Both the technology design – the hardware and the software – and ICT training and capacity should also be considered.

Ambassador Maurer called for the continuation of discussions between stakeholders on the use of ICT in crisis management. He said that future gatherings should consider how

universal standards could be agreed on, how the private sector might best be engaged and how ICT might best be used to aid the process of UN reform. Ambassador Maurer said that he was looking forward to convening again in early 2008.

Contact:

Daniel Stauffacher, Chairman, ICT4Peace Foundation danielstauffacher@ict4peace.org

