INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE
MEETING OF ALL CHAIRPERSONS OF IASC SUBSIDIARY BODIES AND
CLUSTER WORKING GROUPS

Emergency Telecommunications Cluster and Sub-Working Group on Emergency Telecommunications

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The Working Group on Emergency Telecommunications (WGET), established in 1994, is a forum to increase the effectiveness of its participants related to regulatory, operational and technical aspects of telecommunications for disaster relief. WGET participants include international, governmental and non-governmental humanitarian organizations as well as the private sector and academia specialized in emergency telecommunications (ET). Its objectives include:

  (a) promoting and coordinating cooperation and interoperability of telecommunications with and in the field.

  (b) exchanging and disseminating information concerning emergency telecommunications;

  (c) facilitating the promotion and implementation of The Tampere Convention[1];

  (d) encouraging measures applying the ITU resolutions and recommendations relative to telecommunications for disaster relief

WGET has been instrumental in establishing most of the ET standards for disaster relief including MOSS/MISTS; the Tampere Convention; standard radio selcals and callsigns; common radio rooms and ICT infrastructure including VSATs; cooperation with the private sector and provision of common ET tools (GSM, Wireless, etc.); common training resources (i.e. Handbook on Emergency Telecommunications); UN umbrella contracts/long-term agreements; standard operating procedures (SOPs); and several ITU resolutions to ensure the un-hindered use of the technologies and networks for humanitarian agencies (portable country code, frequency allocations, regulatory issues, etc.).

In 2004 IASC approved the establishment of the Inter-Agency Emergency Telecommunications (IAET) under WGET as a humanitarian common service. This joint approach defined SOPs from activation through to transition, as well as collaboration tools and templates for assessments, project plans, services and resource allocation. IAET was activated in Liberia, Haiti, Sudan, Chad, Tsunami and South Asia Earthquake emergencies. However, lack of predictable funding and dedicated resources/standby arrangements has made IAET services available only on an ad-hoc and best effort basis. The IEAT work laid the foundation for the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC) concept.

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[1]   The Tampere Convention on the Provision Telecommunication Resources for Disaster Mitigation and Relief Operations was adopted by the Intergovernmental Conference on Emergency Telecommunications (ICET-98), Tampere, Finland, 1998

The spirit of the Cluster approach was applied during the South Asia emergency. As such, ETC was able to respond to the emergency in a coordinated manner including the participation of NGOs. Given the funding limitations, the initial response may not have been possible under the IAET approach.

As per the ETC reports and IASC November discussion, the IAET service will be folded into the ETC model, which will be established in line with the existing WGET workplan for 2006.

In addition to providing overall governance for ETC deployments and evaluations, WGET will continue to play a key role in defining and establishing technical and interoperability standards, common training modules, cooperation with the private sector, addressing regulatory and legal issues and collaboration with the ITU.

Prepared by WGET – February 2006