

**INTER – AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE – WORKING GROUP  
48th MEETING**

**13-14 March 2002**

**at**

**WFP Headquarters, Rome  
Green Tower, Room 6G19**

**Humanitarian Information Symposium: Proposal to Establish  
Multi-Stakeholder Task Team (MUST) on Information Management and Exchange**

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**Background:**

Participants at the Symposium on Best Practices in Humanitarian Information Exchange held in Geneva 4-8 February endorsed a Statement that outlined accepted principles, best practices, lessons learned and recommendations and expressed commitment to working on resolving outstanding issues. To this end, Symposium participants agreed to work proactively within their respective organizations to promote recognition of, and investment in, information management practices to improve humanitarian action.

The Symposium participants recognized that necessary resources would need to be identified and raised to implement these recommendations and follow-up actions. Participants also emphasized the importance of mobilizing necessary resources to provide adequate funding for information management and exchange activities incorporating the results of the recommended actions.

The Symposium acknowledged OCHA's role as focal point in the area of humanitarian information and recommended that a multi-stakeholder task team (MUST) be established by OCHA to follow up on recommendations endorsed in the final Symposium Statement.

**Purpose of MUST:**

To implement Symposium recommendations, including:

- 1) Draft specific guidelines for humanitarian information management and exchange.
- 2) Catalogue best practices through the ongoing development of lessons-learned case studies, project evaluations and the identification of appropriate technologies;
- 3) Establish working groups as needed, including representatives from recipient countries, to implement recommendations;
- 4) Establish and announce an appropriate process for implementing these recommendations through consultation with stakeholders

Specific areas to be addressed through this follow-up process are listed as an appendix to this document.

### **MUST Membership**

The MUST membership should be reflective of the broad range of participants who attended the Symposium, including from UN agencies, international organizations, governments, NGOs, the private sector and media. These participants represented organizations operating in both the field and headquarters. The Symposium participants also recommended stronger participation from local national governments and agencies in these efforts, so it may be important to include these groups in the membership as well.

The MUST membership should build on and be representative of existing working groups and teams with TORs that strengthen information exchange among partners, such as the GIST, the TAG, UNIWYG, etc. At the same time their participation should not result in added burdens to these groups.

Whilst MUST membership would aim to be inclusive and representative, it should not be so large as to be unmanageable. Consultation among key stakeholders will help further define its membership.

### **MUST Mechanisms**

As the recommended focal point, OCHA may wish to establish a secretariat to coordinate the efforts and facilitate communication of the MUST. This will require resources and funding as well as agreement at the senior management level (both in OCHA and the IASC).

The relationship of the MUST to the IASC also needs to be determined. Currently it is recommended that the MUST would not be an IASC sub working group but would seek to keep the IASC apprised of its activities and consult with the IASC where appropriate.

The MUST should look at other examples of successful multi-stakeholder working groups, task teams or steering committees as possible models to refine its TOR and determine the most effective mechanisms to fulfill its task. Suggested examples to review include the TOR for the Sphere project, the TOR for the WMO as focal point for establishing regional climate networks and the TOR for some of the established IASC sub working groups.

The MUST secretariat should be seen as a management and coordination mechanism that supports the MUST and advises, consults and informs the larger humanitarian information community on activities, best practices, lessons learned etc. and provides opportunities to meet and discuss activities. It would also help with advocating best practices to the broader humanitarian community, emphasizing the potential of these

practices to strengthen coordination.

As noted in the Symposium statement, the MUST may establish working groups as necessary to implement recommendations. It was noted that this should be done carefully so as not to have a proliferation of new working groups that may be hard to maintain nor should these working groups duplicate the efforts of existing groups. First, the MUST should build on existing groups (i.e. GIST, UNIWYG, and TAG) and try to identify other similar existing groups who may already be working on some of these issues. To this end, one of the first tasks of the MUST would be to conduct a complete inventory of such groups. Thus any new working groups would address clearly identified gaps.

### **Issues for IASC Consideration**

- 1) MUST TOR: A full consultative process is proposed for the development of TOR that capitalizes on scheduled inter-agency meetings, notably for the TAG, GLIDE and GIST. A final TOR should be ready for presentation to the June IASC WG meeting.
- 2) Relationship of MUST to IASC: An informal link is proposed. MUST would report key activities and results, consult on major initiatives and seek IASC endorsement or concurrence with major decisions that require buy-in by IASC partners.
- 3) Relationship of MUST to existing inter-agency consultative fora on information management and exchange (GIST, GLIDE, UNIWYG, GDIN, etc.)
- 4) MUST Secretariat: A small (exact size and composition to be determined) operating from OCHA/AERIMB.
- 5) Funding: Resources must be found to support the secretariat and pay for MUST activities (travel, meetings, etc.)

**Appendix: Specific areas to be addressed through this Symposium follow-up process:**

**User requirements.** Explore the linkages between data, information and decision-making in critical areas, such as assessments, "who is doing what, where?" and other operational information, particularly in the field. Improve the exchange of data and information collected during natural disasters and complex emergencies for operational purposes as well as to strengthen the database on global disaster impacts over the long-term.

**Quality of Information.** Develop and disseminate standards, ethical guidelines and codes of conduct to address issues of data quality and information integrity.

**Technology.** Evaluate and report on successful applications of new and existing technologies. Identify technology partners and promote the dissemination of appropriate technology practices for varying end uses. Discuss the application of these technologies in a future forum.

**Partnerships.** Strengthen the linkages among existing information systems. Improve relationships between these systems and their stakeholders including decision-makers at the field and headquarters level, as well as with the affected population. Establish public-private partnerships especially in the area of systems and tools development. Define the roles of sector specialists and the media.

**Preparedness.** Promote the preparation of base data for high-risk areas. Calculate and disseminate risk assessments, and build national capacity and develop toolboxes for rapid mobilization of HICs. Raise donor and, where appropriate, media awareness of the importance of information preparedness to humanitarian action.

**Field-level coordination.** Improve field-level information coordination among multiple actors including the UN resident coordinator and UN country team, NGOs, academia, the affected population and other stakeholders. Facilitate OCHA's role as an information field focal point or partner. Evaluate and implement field-level information policies such as access and exit strategies.