

Disaster Management and the Tampere Convention

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1. Introduction

Since November 2000 we have witnessed a series of devastating natural disasters all over the world, killing thousands of people and destroying billions of dollars of habitat and property each year. The notorious Indian Ocean Tsunami on December 26, 2004 killed nearly 240,000 people and displaced more than 1 million people; it further devastated the infrastructure of 12 countries in South Asia and East Africa.¹ The rapid growth of world population and over-exploitation of natural resources, to a certain extent, is accountable for the escalation of the frequency and severity of natural disasters in recent years.

For a long time, people have been thinking of establishing a sustainable disaster management framework to fight against and assist in relief work after natural disasters. In this respect, space-based technologies, such as meteorological and Earth observation satellites, communication satellites, and satellite-based positioning technologies, can take a vital role, as evidenced in past relief practice.² The transnational natural disaster devastated developing and vulnerable countries and demonstrated the need for humanitarian assistance from non-affected countries. International cooperation is urgently needed for disaster management.

As early as of 1990, an international conference on Disaster Communications was held in Geneva, addressing the power of telecommunication systems in disaster recovery and response. The World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction was held in Yokohama in 1994, sending out the Yokohama Message and Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action. The Yokohama Message affirms the following points, “a.

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¹ See Coordination and the Indian Ocean Tsunami, http://ochaonline.un.org/ocha2006/chap6_1.htm (last visited Jan. 10, 2008).

² See Kathrin Stolzenburg, *Regional Perspectives on Digital Disaster Management in Latin America and the Caribbean*, the United Nations, LC/W.128, at 11, available at <http://www.eclac.org/publicaciones/xml/9/28529/W128.pdf> (last visited Feb. 29, 2008).

the impact of natural disaster in terms of human and economic losses has risen in recent years, and society in general has become more vulnerable to natural disaster; b. disaster prevention, mitigation, preparedness and relief are four elements which contribute to and gain from the implementation of sustainable development policies; c. disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness are better than disaster response in achieving the goals and objectives of the decade; d. the world is increasingly interdependent. All countries shall act in a new spirit of partnership to build a safer world based on common interests and shared responsibility to save human lives, since natural disaster do not respect borders; e. the information, knowledge and some of the technology necessary to reduce the effect of natural disasters can be available in many cases at low cost and should be applied; f. community involvement and their active participation should be encouraged in order to gain greater insight into the individual and collective perception of development and risk, and to have a clear understanding of the cultural and organizational characteristic of each society as well as of its behaviors and interactions.”³

³ See OOSA Doc, *Space Technology and Disaster Management*, 5-6 (2005).