

New UN satellite communications deal boosts disaster preparedness and recovery efforts



8 October 2009 – In a bid to strengthen emergency communications before impending natural disasters strike and to save more lives by better coordinating relief efforts in their aftermath, the United Nations has teamed up with two leading global satellite companies, the UN telecommunications agency announced today.

Inmarsat and Vizada have agreed to donate 70 state-of-the-art and highly portable satellite devices – capable of delivering voice and broadband data wherever disasters take place – to the International Telecommunications Union (**ITU**).

ITU will receive preferential airtime rates and technical training support as part of the agreement, the UN agency said.

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“This partnership builds on our long-standing cooperation and comes at a critical time when many countries are being affected by disasters resulting in thousands of people losing their lives,” said Sami Al Basheer, Director of ITU’s Telecommunication Development Bureau.

“When everything else fails, satellite communications provides a critical link for humanitarian agencies and victims,” Mr. Al Basheer noted in a statement, welcoming the deal.

Cosmas Zavazava, ITU’s Chief of Emergency Telecommunications, said that the agency “continues to attract partners committed to using technology to save lives. This people-oriented partnership is one such example.”

Mr. Zavazava said that following the launch of an ITU initiative to enhance cooperation in the telecommunications field, industry leaders in technology, financing and air freight services are now able to rally around the agency’s rapid response efforts, “helping countries hit by disasters through the use of information communications technology (ICT) when terrestrial networks are disrupted or destroyed.”

In a related development, 19 chief technical officers (CTOs) **called** on the ITU to lead efforts in overhauling global ICT standards in a meeting at the Geneva-based agency's headquarters on Tuesday.

The CTOs agreed on a set of recommendations to better address the evolving needs of the fast-moving ICT industry, including facilitating the launch of new products, services and applications; promoting cost-effective solutions; combating climate change; and greater inclusion of developing countries in creating standards.

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