

Mr. Bristol expressed regret that the UN inter-agency consultations on early warning of new mass refugee flows, held in Geneva between 1993 and 1995, were discontinued. Dr. Dedring noted that such consultations were halted because of internal divisions within DHA. Efforts to revive the consultations had failed so far. Mr. Carlson added that weekly meetings between DPA, DPKO and DHA still take place with the objective of enabling departments to bring critical issues to general attention. Particular items of importance can be conveyed to senior UN officials.

Mr. Bristol stated that three questions relating to early warning had not been adequately addressed in the general academic debate thus far:

- Who should the targets of early warning be?
- When should the early warning signals be given?
- What actions need to be undertaken?

In general, too much emphasis is placed on crisis response. DHA can respond to crises within 48 hours, UNHCR within 24 hours; but this does not prevent crises from occurring. The one body that is capable of taking preventive action, the Security Council, is unlikely to do so if Member States are opposed.

Mr. Bristol then considered the indicators used in HEWS. Although the use of early warning indicators is the most productive way of going forward, there is a methodological debate within the social sciences community that revolves around objectivity and truth. Some researchers are trying to set up a quantitative model based on empirical information. Nevertheless, the question remains, how can early warning information derived from indicators be translated into conflict prediction?

In considering the links between NGOs and the UN, Mr. Bristol recommended that:

- such links be nurtured by having the UN assist and feed into regional early warning networks set up by NGOs and other organizations (e.g. human rights and development assistance groups);
- assessments by as many individuals and groups as possible be pooled together;
- informal links with NGOs, which may be able to act in circumstances where the UN cannot, be developed.

Mr. Bristol concluded that, when designing early warning mechanisms, there is a need to understand what tools are available and who will undertake action. The analysis should be designed around this knowledge, and not vice-versa. The time-frame for action must also be taken into account.