

into reports which highlight crucial developments and trends. DHA can analyze the data further and feed it into the decision-making process within the UN, with the objective of obtaining early warning for disaster preparedness and for the avoidance of humanitarian emergencies.

Overview of the UN's Early Warning Assets

Dr. Jurgen Dedring, Senior Humanitarian Affairs Officer, UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs, then provided an overview of the UN's early warning assets. He began his presentation by remarking that the UN has made a major breakthrough with regard to information. HEWS demonstrates the power of information, showing that an information structure should not stand alone but should instead be interactive.

The question that arises is whether the purpose of HEWS is to *prevent* conflicts or, instead, to make possible early responses. There may be some tensions between prevention and contingency planning. Objectives of early warning must be determined before the approach can be fine-tuned.

Dr. Dedring outlined several of the early warning and information systems that exist. In addition to HEWS, information is available from commercial data bases and from other UN organizations involved in systematic information-sharing, including UNCHR, FAO, WHO and UNDP. These various information sources make it clear that information is readily available. However, the crucial question remains: what is to be done with that information? The following important issues arise:

- While early warning information often is readily available, in most cases there is a lack of analysis, as UN political officers often have little time for such analysis. Furthermore, officers may not have the appropriate qualifications and training for analysis, and may work in isolation from each other.
- How can triggers be identified once information on the background to potential is obtained?
- Is it preferable to speak with one voice or with many when providing early warning?
- Are good response mechanisms in place once warning messages have been received?
- How can early warning messages be conveyed to senior decision-makers? Will they listen despite being pressed for time?