Internet and the telephone, however, there remains the challenge of securing confidentiality during transmission and after reception.

The Internet currently provides wide-ranging background information, which can be useful in exploring the nature of conflicts, current and emerging. The UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs has already established excellent sites for information-sharing on areas of conflict.[28] ReliefWeb is an excellent example. This publicly-available database covers countries where disasters (natural or manmade) are actually occurring.[29] Because it uses media reports, it has the advantage that information that could not normally be provided by the UN (e.g., not fully substantiated or embarrassing information) is included on the UN site. The countries covered by ReliefWeb are only those for which a consolidated UN appeal has been made. This requires a request from the state itself and therefore rules out many countries which might be targeted for early warning. In Africa, for example, the conflict-ridden countries currently covered by ReliefWeb are Angola, the Great Lakes countries (Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire), Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Sudan.[30] Nigeria, a country with no current humanitarian emergency but with significant potential for such disaster, would not be covered.[31]

Human rights abuses can be important indicators of emerging or escalating conflict. Several UN human rights agencies can provide useful information. The UN Commission on Human Rights has a mandate for global monitoring of human rights. Its special rapporteurs conduct in-depth investigations of human rights abuses. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has among his/her functions "prevention and early warning." In 1994 the 24-hour hot line was established to "allow the United Nations Centre for Human Rights in Geneva to monitor and react rapidly to human rights emergencies, such as the 1994 crisis in Rwanda."[32] Input is solicited from victims, their relatives and NGOs to initiate "urgent, potentially life-saving contact" with the Special Procedures Branch of the Centre. The hotline and database are designed to improve the "timely flow of information from and to special rapporteurs from anywhere in the world", and form the basis of an electronic network linking the globe[33].

2. Analysis of Information

In order to undertake early warning, the UN also needs a more sophisticated analytical capacity in the Secretariat. Thorough analysis of incoming information is necessary to spot trends, to corroborate alarming reports and to identify further information that must be sought. This latter function is an important part of the feedback loop. Early warning is more easily achieved when specific information is targeted and deliberately sought out, based usually on