

In conclusion, Mr Sanger emphasized that early warning practitioners should not be overly critical of the media. The information they provide can be useful for early warning purposes, particularly if linked to that which is provided by aid workers and policy-makers. After all, it was the BBC that broke the news of the Ethiopian famine and provided the extra push needed for action by governments.

### **Relief and Development NGOs**

Mr. Gilles Sandré, National Director of International Services, Canadian Red Cross Society, made a presentation on early warning mechanisms within non-UN international organizations, most of which rely on field-based early warning systems.

Early warning has been used more or less systematically since the early 1990s when, as a result of developments in Somalia, it was recognized that there existed a need for contingency planning, conflict- and disaster-prevention, rapid assessment, and rapid response. Data collection is used as one of the parameters for determining response.

NGOs employ two kinds of data for their early warning: macro-triggers and micro-triggers. The first, macro-triggers, relate to data reflecting national and international perspectives (e.g. data on national and regional politics, geopolitical context, national security, national economic phenomena, satellite-based climactic and agronomic data, and the presence of operations involving international actors).

Mr. Sandré then assessed whether such systems already in place could be relied upon to collect such macro-level data, and concluded that what exists is rather crude. While there are organisations that are interested in such issues, it is unclear whether any of them is already advanced enough for complex early warning purposes. These organisations include: the UN departments, programmes and agencies (DHA, WFP, FAO, UNHCR), which tend to look for raw data relating to their field of work; the media, which is more interested in selling news than in collecting data; nationally-based early warning systems, such as USAid's Famine Early Warning System; diplomatic and intelligence networks; and international organizations and international NGO networks, including the International Red Cross Movement, Médecins Sans Frontières, CARE International and church networks.

Mr Sandré discussed the obvious limitations of global, macro-level early warning systems:

- They are very sophisticated and often compile too much information;
- The focus is on the "big picture", which can vary greatly from the "small picture";
- The data is raw, is rarely updated and generally is not analyzed in any depth;
- The data requires full verification in order to be credible;