

SESSION I: The Status of the United Nations' Early Warning Capacity**The Department of Humanitarian Affairs' Humanitarian Early Warning System**

Mr. Adeel Ahmed, Associate Humanitarian Affairs Officer, UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), gave a presentation on the development of an early warning system within DHA, including a description of the purpose and functioning of the Humanitarian Early Warning System (HEWS).

HEWS was formed two years ago, when there was a realization that despite the existence of a multitude of pieces of information that could be used for early warning purposes, there was too little organization and analysis of such data. HEWS was created with the purpose of placing existing information into a proper context for policy makers in order to improve early warning efforts and to facilitate decision-making.

Using visual aids, Mr. Ahmed introduced the components of HEWS. The general data provides both statistical and well as contextual and dynamic (i.e. descriptive) information about countries and regions. HEWS further provides the possibility of simple data analysis, such as data correlation, comparative statistics and trend evaluations (both by indicators and sectors), as well as the ability to identify critical factors for specific countries and regions. The HEWS database includes selected news information relating to particular countries as well as information from the Security Council and from private assessment firms.

Information relating to the following categories is available: human rights, conflict or potential for conflict, the situation of the government, military and arms information, highlights from other information sources from within the UN System (e.g. FAO's Global Information and Early Warning System on Food and Agriculture and WHO's Epidemiological Early Warning System) and from other governments (e.g. USAID'S Famine Early Warning System), information from field reports, disaster reports, descriptions of the vulnerability of different regions and countries, contextual information on countries (e.g. on the state of airports, television, radio) and a category which provides data that is unique to a particular country and does not fit into any of the other categories (e.g. data on any social or economic inequalities within a country). HEWS also includes statistical data relating to economics, trade, food and agriculture, health, demographics, finance, and displaced persons. The data can be mapped by indicator and country, and countries and regions can be compared. Information can be analyzed and correlated, and key indicators can be drawn for each country.

Conceptually, HEWS is both simple and easy to grasp. Its purpose is to provide information for contingency planning. A wealth of information can easily be incorporated