

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report presents the major issues and policy responses discussed at the first seminar on humanitarian early warning of the Humanitarian Policy Forum, which was held on the 17th of May 1996 at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

G-7 leaders meeting in Halifax in June, 1995, called upon the UN Secretary-General "to explore means to improve the analysis and utilization of disaster and conflict-related early-warning information...". This was not a request for the accumulation of more data; core elements for the collection of data already are in place. Instead, what was sought was an enhanced analytical capacity and a process whereby the information available could be used more efficiently by decision-makers.

Specific issues for consideration at the seminar included an examination of the UN's early warning capacity, including the adequacy of institutional and financial support for early warning mechanisms, the internal dissemination of early warning information within the UN system and to Member States, in light of political sensitivities on the part of individual countries. The role of the media and of non-governmental organizations as "triggers" for humanitarian action, and the issue of the relationship between early warning and early response by the international community were also examined. The experiences of Somalia and Rwanda provided case-studies in early warning.

Several recommendations were identified by the participants: early warning needs to be made to work more effectively; the best possible early warning mechanism is of limited use if the right people are not there to respond; there is a need to know more about how decision-making operates, and about how early warning information can be brought to bear with decision-makers; early warning is itself a form of political action; the role of leadership is critical both in early warning and response; and a tension exists between the coordination of early warning and encouraging a multitude of early warning voices.

The Global and Human Issues Bureau would like to thank Ms. Susanne Schmeidl, Post-Doctorate Fellow, Centre for Refugee Studies, York University, for serving as rapporteur for the seminar.