

Discussion

The general issue of the availability of information from HEWS arose (e.g. when the information might be available to Member States or to other bodies such as the OAU).

It was stated that the first goal of HEWS is to make early warning information available within the UN, and that certain issues must be addressed before such information is shared more widely: a) how to share it and, more importantly; b) what information can be included in a version of HEWS that is shared with other organizations. Efforts are underway to link HEWS with the ReliefWeb, and the UN has begun discussions with academics. The HEWS team in DHA includes only three officers, which means that the time available to undertake theoretical work is limited. It has therefore been argued that academics should be invited to undertake some work and to feed into HEWS.

A participant asked to what extent HEWS is in fact a *political* - as opposed to a *humanitarian* - early warning system, and to what extent the one diverts attention from the other. In response, Mr Carlson noted that the UN could not provide political early warning. The problem with humanitarian early warning is that the better it gets, the more sensitive the information it produces becomes. HEWS is intended to cover humanitarian issues, but inevitably such information have a political component as well.

The following issues and concerns regarding indicators were raised by participants:

- There is a risk that early warning "noise" may drown out essential early warning information. In Africa, for example, the amber light might be flashing in relation to many countries, given economic conditions there, but this would make it difficult to anticipate true crises.
- Greater effort should be accorded to drawing upon the various research projects being undertaken by academics and NGOs (Minorities at Risk, PANDA, KEDS, GEDS, etc.).
- Indicators need to be reconciled and information overload taken into account. Why is HEWS not already overloaded, given the quantity of information it absorbs? A pilot study undertaken by York University's Centre for Refugee Studies indicates that the most useful information may in fact be received from a myriad of small actors.

The following issues and concerns regarding analysis were raised by participants:

- In considering early warning information, consideration must be given to context as well as quantity. To what extent does HEWS draw upon area experts to place early warning information in context?