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*Via International Post and E-Mail (mountain@un.org)*

Mr. Ross Mountain  
Director  
Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs—Geneva  
United Nations  
Palais des Nations  
CH-1211 Geneve 10  
Switzerland

Dear Mr. Mountain:

I write in response to Ryszard Struzak's report, *Evaluation of the OCHA (DRB) Project on Emergency Telecommunications With and In the Field* (2000), to highlight several of Dr. Struzak's recommendations and to urge the continued and expanded participation of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the field of emergency telecommunications.

I have been privileged to work with OCHA and its predecessors, the International Telecommunication Union, and other United Nations agencies in the area of emergency telecommunications for the past ten years. I was a delegate to the original Conference on Disaster Communications in Tampere, Finland (1991); convener of the Roundtable on The Media, Scientific Information and Disasters at the 1994 World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction in Yokohama; convener of the United Nations Scientific and Technical Committee's 1995 meeting on communications and disaster mitigation in Washington; chair of the drafting committee of the Working Group on Emergency Telecommunications that drafted the Tampere Convention on the Provision of Telecommunication Resources for Disaster Mitigation and Relief Operations (Tampere Convention); moderator of the Informal Consultations on the Draft Tampere Convention in Geneva in April 1998; and an expert on behalf of the Government of Finland at the Intergovernmental Conference on Emergency Telecommunications in Tampere, Finland, in June 1998, at which the Tampere Convention was adopted. I am the editor and author of many publications in this field, including *International Disaster Communications: Harnessing the Power of Communications to Avert Disasters and Save Lives*, *Media, Disaster Relief and Images of the Developing World*, and "Communications, Policy Making, and Humanitarian Crises" in *From Massacres to Genocide: The Media, Public Policy, and Humanitarian Crises*. Suffice it to say, I am intimately familiar with the United Nation's important work in the field of emergency telecommunications.

I certainly do not need to tell you of the significant achievement that adoption of the Tampere Convention represents. Not only does it facilitate the rapid deployment of telecommunications to prevent and mitigate disasters and other emergencies—its critical,

essential purpose—but is also a remarkable diplomatic and legal achievement: It is the first international legal instrument to extend privileges and immunities to relief workers who are not otherwise diplomats or attending diplomatic conferences. It was the first treaty-like instrument formed by the people it most directly affects—relief organizations and telecommunications equipment and service suppliers—not by government diplomats and lawyers. And it is a model for how governmental and nongovernmental institutions can work together to solve multinational problems. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, it was the beginning of a process of desperately needed intense consultation among international and national agencies, NGOs, scientific and technical organizations, academic institutions, and companies—all focused on facilitating rapid, reliable, and safe deployment of emergency telecommunications infrastructure in the field. The Working Group on Emergency Telecommunications, almost as much as the Tampere Convention itself, is a major practical accomplishment of the past decade's work.

I could not agree more strongly with Dr. Struzak's conclusion that "Without the effort of OCHA and its predecessors, the Convention would not now exist." (p. 11) To be more specific, despite the variety of structural changes that OCHA and its predecessors have endured during the past decade, Hans Zimmerman never lost sight of the importance of creating the Tampere Convention. He was an energetic, reliable force from beginning to end, sometimes using personal funds and leave time to continue to press for the negotiation and adoption of the Convention. He literally traveled the globe, explaining the concept of the Convention to anyone who would listen. The Convention is testimony to his unflagging energy and ubiquitous presence, and all of us who were involved in drafting the Convention recognize the debt that we owe to Hans and to OCHA.

I would also like to highlight Dr. Struzak's conclusion that there is still critical work for OCHA to accomplish. The Tampere Convention itself, with the approval of the relevant United Nations authorities, calls on the OCHA to serve as "operational coordinator" and delegates significant responsibilities in Articles 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9. The partnership forged between OCHA and the International Telecommunication Union, which was so critical in the adoption of the Tampere Convention, is even more important in carrying out the important tasks of the Convention. I urge you to follow the recommendations of Dr. Struzak and ensure that OCHA is directed to fulfill its responsibilities and to enhance that partnership, and that the staff are provided with the resources necessary to do so. It is difficult to imagine a more important role for OCHA than fulfilling its obligations under the Tampere Convention.

Finally, I write to urge your support for Dr. Struzak's recommendation for an expanded role for OCHA in promoting the ratification and use of the Tampere Convention. Let me be clear, the Convention is not an end in itself, but it is a key element in a broader strategy of using telecommunication resources to save and improve lives. Its ratification is critical, therefore, not to preserve the Convention as a legal instrument, but rather to ensure that the systems and infrastructure it creates are in place for that essential purpose. Moreover, the *process* of ratification, like the processing of creating the Tampere Convention, is certain to improve coordination and focus government and public attention on this critical area. Finally, making a

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success of the Tampere Convention will heightens its usefulness as a model of an innovative way to address other vexing issues that confront humanitarian relief efforts.

I recognize that you work within a complicated system and limited resources, and I am painfully aware that my own country is in large part responsible for OCHA's financial distress. Nevertheless, the hallmark of OCHA's most important contribution to the Tampere Convention has been the longevity of OCHA's support and the steadfastness of Hans Zimmerman's leadership in the field of emergency telecommunications. I urge you to renew OCHA's commitment to this vital endeavor, and I pledge you my energetic support for your efforts to do so. Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

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cc: Ryszard Struzak (by e-mail—[ryszard.struzak@ties.itu.int](mailto:ryszard.struzak@ties.itu.int))