

Seminar on Crisis Management and Information Technology
Helsinki, 29 September – 1 October 2002

First session: *“International organisations and the new challenges in crisis management”*
Introductory remarks by President Martti Ahtisaari, Crisis Management Initiative

Dear Friends,

On behalf of the ITCM and Object Management Group who are co-hosting this event, I would like to welcome you to this seminar on Crisis Management and Information Technology. And also a warm welcome to Helsinki. I would like to thank each of you personally for making the effort of reserving two days from your busy schedules and come here to attend the seminar.

We have managed to gather a group of highly distinguished experts on humanitarian emergencies, peace support operations and national emergency situations. We are also lucky to have experts on utilising information and communication technology for these different and complex crisis situations. In addition to this, the seminar has a very good mix of persons with civilian or military expertise in crisis management. And I warn you – we will take advantage of that. We have invited you here to work. To find ways to enhance the tools that our organisations have available for crisis response and management. The seminar aims to find practical means to improve the coordination and information sharing between different organisations as well as interoperability of the communication and IT-systems.

Even if the schedule is tight, I hope you have time to enjoy each other's company and Helsinki as well.

Funny enough, this is not first time that I find my self deeply involved in the IT-systems in the work of international organisations. Anybody who knows me also knows that I can hardly be described as an IT-expert. When I was the Under-Secretary General for Administration and Management in the United Nations I started the Integrated Management Information System, which has developed an integrated system for the processing of and reporting on administrative actions at all duty stations. My successors have continued with the project and a major accomplishment has been that IMIS has not failed like many similar initiatives elsewhere.

For most of my career, I have worked on development co-operation and crisis prevention, management and resolution issues. I have also been trying to find innovative, yet practical solutions to problems that hinder the efficient response to conflicts. When Mr. Antti Häikiö and Mr. Kari Laitinen approached me with the Information Technology and Crisis Management-project proposal I was immediately taken with the idea.

Based on my own experiences in heading the UN operation, UNTAG, in Namibia and on my later involvement in the crisis management in the Balkans, I realised that this kind of integrated ICT-system designed to support the decision-making and communication in multilateral peace support operations is absolutely vital aid for all working in a field operation. Today, crisis management involves the activities of a great number of agents confronting the same problems but lacking a shared or consistent knowledge, coordination or communications technology or user culture. As a consequence, the different organisations work wastefully on the same problems, plan and take

decisions without consulting other organisations or without access to up-to-date or adequate knowledge.

It is very easy to be fatalistic and to consider the coordination of the activities of different entities in crisis response operations as a 'mission impossible'. And also to conclude that the competition between organisations is a fact of life, which cannot be changed. I don't want to underestimate these challenges but I do see these as excuses. These difficult challenges are surmountable so we should work hard to overcome them.

We have organised this seminar in four parts. This first session aims to set the framework for the discussion and asks the questions – what is the current state of crisis management and what are the challenges for organisations involved? The second part will look at the managerial questions in field operations. We all know that ICT cannot support badly planned management structures and administrative procedures or non-existent chains for control and communication. In the third session we will have a chance to review some examples of the use of ICT-systems and tools in different crisis situations. The final session is a working session, in which we will divide ourselves into four working groups to brainstorm, among other things, practical steps to be taken to improve the civil-military coordination and to discuss organisations' IT needs and requirements.

I believe that the discussions here have an important function, since talk is the necessary precursor to action. Nothing will change unless the organisations agree, through dialogue. Without a genuine dialogue, there will never be agreement; without agreement there will be no action. The United States Institute of Peace, its Virtual Diplomacy Program has organised excellent workshops and seminars on how to implement and use information and communications technologies in promoting the prevention of, as well as the management and resolution of international conflicts. They have kindly made all their reports available for our seminar participants, so please get a copy for your self.

I feel that now is also the time to get involved at a very practical level. Talk is often a poor substitute for action. All too often talk becomes an end in itself, masking the absence of real progress. We have to break down the artificial borders between governmental and non-governmental sectors, civilian-and military organisations and public and private sectors. In this globalised world and in the world of new security political challenges and complex crisis situations we can't afford to stay in our narrow domains.

We don't want this seminar to be a one -off event but to establish more permanent co-operation and dialogue between these different actors I mentioned earlier. On Tuesday therefore, we will have a consultative meeting to study the feasibility and the interest of invited organisations in establishing/joining a Joint Advisory Council for the ITCM-project and the Object Management Group's C4I Domain Task Force. This council would be a step in the right direction in developing a more structured co-operation between international organisations and IT-vendors. I will also expedite interoperability solutions and standards suited to modern crisis management.

Now, I would like to give the floor for few minutes for my co-chairman and the co-host of this seminar Dr. Richard Soley, Director of the Object Management Group.