



JAN-ERIK ENESTAM, MINISTER OF DEFENCE OF FINLAND
Seminar on Crisis Management and Information Technology
Speech
Inaugural dinner In Hotel Strand Inter-Continental
29 September 2002

Dear participants of the seminar on Crisis Management and Information Technology, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me a great pleasure to attend this seminar on crisis management and information technology. The topic is extremely important and it also explains, why so many distinguished experts from different countries and organizations have arrived to Helsinki for the occasion. I would especially like to thank president Ahtisaari and his staff for their efforts to make this seminar possible.

The title of the seminar includes two important concepts, crisis management and information technology. The value of this seminar is in the fact that these two concepts, as often as they are discussed these days, are rarely mentioned in the same sentence. For decades, we have emphasized the importance of crisis management as a positive tool of conflict management and prevention. And on the basis of our everyday life experiences, we are very well aware of how much new technology has changed our lives - more for good than for bad.

I am very impressed of the wide array of topics that you are going to discuss during the next two days. I am convinced of the useful nature of this exercise. As a result, we will gain important knowledge that will contribute to the crisis management of various international organizations active in this field. In our interdependent world, the diffusion of new technologies and innovations is faster than ever. It is our task to ensure that they will be used in a way that enhances international security and stability.

Finland is a firm believer in the cooperation-based international security. One could even say - with a little exaggeration - that it is not important on which field you cooperate with others, as long as you cooperate. It is true, however, that crisis management, understood as a range of measures from pre-emptive to post-conflict ones, is the field where international cooperation is particularly welcome. I would therefore like to say a few words of the present challenges connected to the international cooperation in the field of crisis management.

Since the tragic events of September 11 last year, two lines of approach to international security cooperation has emerged. One is the line of immediate action against the most acute threats such as terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. In today's world a country cannot isolate itself and declare that such threats as terrorism do not concern it. Terrorists hit where they find an easy target and a good publicity. It has become clear since the dreadful attacks of New York City and Washington last year, that any place on earth could become a target of a terrorist act. Kenya and Tanzania were hit in August 1998, not because they were found to be central actors, but because it was easy to carry out such a strike.

The lesson of these events was clear: the countries of the world must unite their forces as terrorism is a serious threat to everybody. It was also understood that close cooperation and coordination had to be immediate. There was no time to be wasted, action was needed here and now. And this was precisely what was done. The international community started an operation in Afghanistan, each country according to its capabilities and fields of competence. Thanks to this, it was possible to eliminate the immediate threat of terrorism that was organized from the more or less secret premises of terrorist organizations in Afghanistan. After only a few weeks of cooperation, the previous regime that gave shelter to al-Qaeda, was thrown out, and there was a chance to start a slow movement towards normalcy - a movement that would, however, take a long time.

Ladies and gentlemen!

It has recently been emphasized on various forums that you can temporarily remove the danger of terrorism with military means but that for permanent solutions a whole variety of active measures are needed. Women and men of the street often understand crisis management as a measure that is adopted once the violent stage of the conflict is over. In most cases, this is naturally true. We must have international arrangements that make restoration of order, stability and security possible in territories where violence has made everyday life difficult, or even impossible.

Finland has participated in the international crisis management since 1956, when our soldiers arrived to the Suez Canal under the UN flag. Since then, approximately 43.000 Finns have served in various operations. Today, we have over 1.000 peacekeepers abroad, most of them participating in Nato-led operations in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In addition, we are involved in operations in Afghanistan, Kashmir and Ethiopia-Eritrea. Within the NORDCAPS concept - that is the Nordic Coordinated Arrangement for Military Peace Support - the Nordic countries have an objective to develop the future crises management capabilities in close cooperation. Within this concept, Finland has taken upon the role of the coordinating nation for command and information capability of the Nordic Brigade in Kosovo. This project enables us to combine two areas that we want to emphasize. The first is the multinational cooperation in the crisis management and the other is the need to focus on our areas of specialization.

Finland is not known on the basis of its peacekeeping history alone. Finland also enjoys a good reputation as a modern information society. And here I see a linkage where Finland could specialize and serve the whole international community.

I hope that this international seminar here in Helsinki can be a starting point for a longer process where the linkages between crisis management and information technology can be elaborated. As you have noticed, in your program tomorrow and on Tuesday, there are several items where you have an opportunity to discuss the ways to utilize information technology for very practical purposes in the crisis management operations.

But information technology is not relevant for actual operations only. It is also needed in anticipating various critical developments that in the worst case could lead to very violent consequences. We should improve our capabilities to recognize symptoms that could reveal these developments at a stage where precautionary measures still would be effective. A crisis prevented is always the best alternative for the international security and stability. All operations need, most of all, sufficient political leadership. But there are other requirements as well. I think that the exchange of information plays a crucial role in our efforts to achieve this goal. But exchange of information is also central when we have started field operations. I was very pleased to see that you have dedicated an entire workshop to highlight these issues and that it will also be discussed from the viewpoint of various organizations and operations.

Finally, I am sure that you know as well as I do that it is not enough to discuss these issues. No, it is just as important to make sure that the best ideas that you process here during the next couple of days can be further scrutinized and put into action thereafter. It is needless to say that information technology can offer solutions that can help international crisis management activities in several ways. To utilize the possibilities in the best possible way, a permanent interaction between theory and practice is needed. We all know that these two levels do not necessarily always meet. This seminar shows that such an interaction is possible if we actively take up on the challenge.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would once more like to wish you a warm welcome to Helsinki and to this important seminar. I wish you busy and successful two days amid an issue that is now more relevant than ever before. I wish you best of luck to you in your valuable work!