



**Communications Strategy  
Discussion Paper  
Rosersberg Initiative Working Group  
Tunis, 3-5 December 2007**



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**Purpose**

This document proposes ideas and options for raising public awareness about environmental emergencies, for discussion at the 3-5 December 2007 meeting of the Rosersberg Working Group. It is intended to be read in the context of other background documents prepared for this event. It is based on recommendation from the 7<sup>th</sup> Advisory Group of Environmental Emergencies (AGEE) meeting held in June 2007.

**Strategy**

Goal:

To increase communications activities of AGEE members with the intent of raising the profile of environmental emergencies. Specifically, the audience should understand what is meant by the term “environmental emergencies” and have an image come to their minds when they hear or read the term. Secondly, no audience will remember key messages, or other material *verbatim*. It is necessary, therefore, to leave the audience with two impressions:

- Environmental emergencies happen and are risks to human lives and welfare
- International effort is required to address environmental emergencies quickly and that effort must continue to grow

Defining the term will be achieved through words, but also through pictures. A news story in newspapers or on websites about an emergency coupled with a picture will help enforce the definition. News stories describing the response actions and describing how representatives from other countries participated will depict the multinational nature of response.

Audience:

- General public
- Mainstream media, new media
- “Trade” media – environmental/humanitarian journals
- Humanitarian community

The methods employed in achieve this goal must tightly scripted and focused on a broad audience. It will serve no purpose to parse the audience and have many distinct messages being communicated to an equal number of audiences. Competition between the messages will only result in messages being drowned out by one another. Decision-makers, and other relevant actors who could influence decisions about a country's participation in an international mission, are members of a society. A communications strategy aimed at the general public has the potential of reaching these actors through their "private" lives.

It is also important to keep in perspective that single messages can have equal impact on to disparate groups. Messages can be as applicable to the general public as to the humanitarian community, and to countries that are susceptible to disasters. When attention is brought to an emergency, those countries prone to similar events understand that there is a way to access international help to both respond to an emergency and develop capacity to deal with one.

#### Key Messages:

- Environmental emergencies happen as a result of natural disasters, technological accidents and complex emergencies.
- They are a threat and cause the loss of life and the dislocation of people around the world.
- It is essential to identify sources of emergencies quickly and develop solutions.
- As climate-related disasters increase due to climate change, the number of environmental emergencies will also increase. The world must be prepared to act more often.
- International effort is often required to assist countries dealing with an environmental emergency.

#### Tool and Tactics:

The tactics and tools available must be understood on a simple premise: seizing communications opportunities when they exist and creating communications opportunities when there is something to announce.

#### Mainstream media

##### *Campaigns:*

- An awareness campaign is being developed between the Joint Environment Unit and Green Cross International, which was agreed to by the AGEE. The campaign will use the Environmental Emergencies Partnership as the platform to recognize the efforts of countries, national and international organization, and other institutions that respond to environmental emergencies and countries that improve their domestic capacity to respond to emergencies.

##### *Communication Opportunities:*

- Milestones, new initiatives, significant events can be used as stages themselves to announce their launch and another time to deliver key messages. The completion of the Environmental module of the International Humanitarian Partnership, the Flash Environmental Assessment Tool, the new relationship with VEOLIA, and other

agreements with new partners in the future, should have a communications plan developed and allow for media to be present.

- Similarly, if new tools are developed in countries for domestic use that have an international application, the international aspect should be highlighted as well in governmental communications.
- If specific countries, based on their geographical or linguistic characteristics are going to be targeted in advocacy, target communications in these same countries should also be considered. Opinion articles in domestic publications are one option to consider.

#### *Missions:*

- Every emergency presents an opportunity to communicate with the public. Countries should issue press releases when experts are deployed on international missions. Similarly, receiving countries should issue press releases or statements when the mission is over thanking the donating country and the UN for their assistance. Mirroring the release of the donating country, the Joint Environment Unit should issue press releases when the mission is deployed through it.

#### *Articles:*

- A target for articles published in the “trade” press should be established. For example, two interesting missions should be chosen a year. The experts could write and submit articles to the humanitarian and environmental journals.

#### *New media*

##### *Wikipedia:*

- Often with basic search engines like Google, Wikipedia articles are located at or near the top of the list. The executive summary of every mission report could be excerpt and inserted into Wikipedia. The original reports could be linked to the submission, which would draw investigators to the Joint Environment Unit web site. The articles and reports would become very accessible to a variety of people.
- Wikipedia also allows lists to be created. With the existence of an “environmental emergencies” article already on the site, a list of emergencies could be added and kept up to date. The Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit map could also be added regularly.

##### *You Tube, or other video posting sites:*

- Although “You tube” has a reputation that may not be compatible with either the United Nations or national governments, it may be an effective way to reach the general public. Most missions should travel with a digital camera for many reasons. If the digital camera has the option to take short videos, one could be taken of each mission as evidence of secondary risks. It wouldn’t be important to identify any organization or individual expert, but to use the video to simply raise the consciousness of the general public that secondary risks can happen as a result of natural disasters, or that industrial accidents can have acute and life-threatening impacts.

##### Objective:

This works through focusing the practical work that is done to respond to environmental emergencies. It will generate questions in the minds of the audience, which are: “what isn’t my country or organization recognized?” and “what’s my country or organization doing?” These questions will, hopefully, put pressure on countries and organizations to be part of the effort.

It will draw attention to the work that countries and other organizations now. This awareness will hopefully affect those countries and organizations ability to keep doing that work by exhibiting the importance of the work, the need of the work and the positive reception of the work.

Rationale:

People probably assume they understand the term “environmental emergency” through their knowledge of each word. This strategy will coin the term and present “environmental emergency” as a compound noun with a specific meaning and examples to the general public. When they hear the word through the media, there will be an immediate understanding. More importantly, there will be anticipation for a response and action on the part of the global community.

Large disasters and technological accidents report themselves. But they tend to be about that disaster or accident. Smaller events, like a tannery in the midst of an earthquake, may not be reported. By existing within the defined and recognizable term of “environmental emergency” the attention that a single event may not receive could be won through the event being part of a larger notion, especially when the notion also encapsulates the larger events.

Questions for Thematic Area 1:

- What other methods could be used to raise the profile of the issue?
- Are there actions countries can take individually to raise the profile of environmental emergencies?
- Are group members satisfied with the key messages?
- Are countries willing/able to issue press releases when they deploy experts?
- What are countries able to do?
- How should the strategy be measured?