

PLENARY MEETING

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Working Group for Emergency Telecommunications (WGET)

IMPORTANCE OF C-BAND SATELLITE SERVICES FOR HUMANITARIAN OPERATIONS

1. Introduction

OCHA is responsible for coordinating effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors. In support of the critical role that information and communications technology (ICT) has in disaster relief and mitigation, OCHA chairs the WGET. This submission is made by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) through the Working Group on Emergency Telecommunications (WGET). Established in 1996 as a technical forum to increase the effectiveness of its participants related to regulatory, operational and technical aspects of telecommunications for disaster relief, the WGET currently serves as a forum for collaboration and innovation on behalf of the members of the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster (ETC), the global network of organizations led by the UN World Food Programme (WFP) that work together to provide common communications services in humanitarian emergencies. The timely, predictable and effective ICT services provided by the ETC support the critical response and coordination among humanitarian organizations, operational security environment for staff and assets, and improved decision-making through timely access to critical information. The WGET works to increase the effectiveness of its participants in supporting the operational and technical aspects of ICT for humanitarian and disaster relief and emergency response. Participation in the WGET is comprised of international, governmental and non-governmental humanitarian organizations with an interest in emergency telecommunications.

2. General Comments

The WGET promotes cooperation, interoperability and standardization of telecommunications solutions with and in the field in support of the ETC. In this regard, we would like to highlight that **humanitarian actors have adopted C-band VSAT technology as a standard**, made significant investments in its deployment, and rely on it for both routine and emergency communications. Satellite communications can be quickly and easily deployed for use where other terrestrial infrastructure is destroyed, unavailable, overloaded or insecure. C-band provides a reliable, stable and critical communication system that is necessary for humanitarian operations. In areas that do not have mature communications infrastructures, and in areas where climatic conditions such as West Africa compromise the effectiveness of other frequency spectra through phenomenon such as rain fade, C-band provides the only reliable option for communications.

Anything that would disrupt or compromise the reliability of C-band communications would have serious consequences, both operational and financial, to the effective functioning of the

humanitarian community. Humanitarian actors including UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP, have already experienced interference of satellite signals in regions where national administrations have enabled International Mobile Telecommunications (IMT) to transmit into the C-band.

3. WGET Position on Agenda Item 1.1 of WRC15

The WGET supports and sees a key role for IMT, but believes **IMT must complement, not disrupt, existing satellite C-band operations**. IMT can benefit field operations by extending the range of terrestrial communications to sub-offices which can be linked to C-band satellite backbone networks to provide enhanced WAN (wide area network) coverage. Thus every effort should be made to ensure C-band and IMT coexist harmoniously.

WGET wishes to express deep concern to the World Radiocommunications Conference and the International Telecommunications Union on the proposals under consideration to share the C-band satellite frequency spectrum with IMT infrastructures under Agenda Item 1.1.

The Working Group for Emergency Telecommunications (WGET) requests that no decision be taken that would negatively impact Humanitarian Operations which utilize C-band satellite, in view of the impact of not utilizing C-band for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, particularly in West Africa, Asia and the Middle East.