

EMC supports IOM's humanitarian efforts



IOM's humanitarian commitment and EMC's logistic support at an emergency situation ensured a quick channelling of assistance tasks in the Tsunami-affected areas.

50 years of commitment

After half a century of worldwide operational experience, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has become the leading international organization working with migrants and governments to provide humane responses to migration challenges. It has now grown to encompass a variety of migration management activities throughout the world.

As an active member of the United Nations, the IOM ensures the cooperation of collective efforts aimed at meeting the needs of the most vulnerable. With offices and operations in every continent, it helps governments and the civil society through rapid humanitarian responses to sudden migration flows, post-emergency return and reintegration programmes, assistance to migrants on their way to new homes and lives, migration medical and public health programmes, etc.

Urgent needs

In December 2004, one of the worst natural disasters in the last 100 years struck the world. As a consequence of an earthquake in the Indian Ocean, a tsunami swept across vast coastal areas in several countries of the region, killing hundreds of thousands of people, and destroying thousands of homes and means of livelihood.

This tragedy generated an immediate response from the IOM, which used all its available resources to provide emergency relief assistance. The logistical support was provided in the form of transportation, medical assistance, shelters and civil military cooperation. In order to carry out these tasks, the organization needed communication infrastructure solutions to quickly set up in remote areas to connect to its corporate data and voice network.

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Willingness to help

Bernardo Mariano, IOM's Chief ITS Information Technology and Communications, was aware of Emerging Markets Communications' (EMC) successful track record with UN World Food Programme and others. Besides, EMC showed a willingness to help. "The last EMC presentation in WGET workshop in Dubai gave the full scope and potential of the solutions EMC can offer in disaster areas," adds Mr. Mariano.

The IOM needed a communications facility in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, one of the most affected areas, and EMC was involved in assessing the requirements, which were fine-tuned during the process of installation. EMC provided satellite equipment and satellite bandwidth plus a link from its teleport in Redditch into the IOM offices in Geneva.

Time was an essential factor. EMC was already involved in providing links in the area to the UN WFP, and was able to switch some of its staff from Nairobi to help speed up the installation and other logistical processes to get the IOM site on line as soon as possible.

Addressing challenges

"Implementing technology in remote areas is always challenging," says Mr. Mariano. "We faced mostly logistical challenges but figured out a way to keep moving forward and had the solution implemented within an acceptable timeframe."

David John, EMC's European Business Manager, explains that they had to face some challenges in transporting the satellite hardware to Banda Aceh, because of the priorities given to relief supplies, but they could overcome all this fairly quickly. EMC was able to leverage its relationship with UN WFP to assist in this.

Mr. John highlights the contribution made by AT&T, which provided the landline circuit connecting the EMC teleport in Redditch to Geneva, as well as the overall project management.

In record time

Industry standard installation lead times for satellite sites are between 60 and 90 days. Taking into account the urgency of the

situation, EMC took the commitment to shorten the deadlines and achieved a real milestone: From the first telephone conversation with Bernardo Mariano to the installation of the link, the process of providing connectivity and communications took 3 weeks, and further amendments to the service were then carried out over the next 4 weeks. As Mr. John points out: "The slowest part of the process was sorting out the local PABX (private automatic branch exchange) connection in Geneva!"

Nowadays, the IOM uses voice over IP and Internet connectivity. "This was for us the first experience with EMC, but the scope might increase based on the positive experience in Indonesia," says Mr. Mariano.

Organisation and logistics

This process has highlighted EMC's key strengths in logistics and organisation and the resulting ability to respond quickly to an emergency situation. "This is due to the fact that our organisational infrastructure of people and offices is based in and around the more difficult areas of the world," explains Mr. John. EMC has offices and people in or within easy reach of the areas where they are most likely to be needed: Bangkok, Nairobi, Dubai, Dakar, Almaty, Moscow, Buenos Aires, Miami and Redditch.

In the Tsunami-affected areas, the IOM has transported relief goods for several international and national donors, the International Committee of the Red Cross, UN agencies, international governmental organizations, national and international NGOs, and foreign military forces.

"For the first time, the IOM emergency site had reliable communication which made a huge difference to our operations. Our business users were all very happy with the solution implemented which greatly improved their ability to operate and deliver the required assistance to our beneficiaries. EMC speed and efficiency has positively impressed us," Bernardo Mariano sums up.