

## **An Up-date from the IARU International Emergency Communications Coordinator**

Dear fellow hams,

It is five years since I wrote the Introduction for the emergency pages of the IARU web site. I do not need to re-write this introduction, because the basics of Amateur Radio Service Emergency Communications have not changed. In fact, they did not change over a much longer period than the five years since my appointment as the IARU International Coordinator for Emergency Communications.

Emergency Communications have been an important part of our work ever since the Amateur Radio Service exists, and the rapid development of public telecommunication networks did not change this: With the increasing complexity of today's networks, their vulnerability has increased, and a region affected by a sudden disaster may find itself in a situation no better than in the early days of radio. Today such a situation might actually be worse: a disruption of communications capabilities we all take for granted, and the knowledge that such loss of communications might prevent available help from reaching those in need, let us feel the need for Emergency Communications more than ever before.

Over the past five years, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number and variety particularly of mobile applications. The Amateur Radio Service did not ignore the new technologies, and it remains at the forefront of technology. At the same time it preserves those characteristics which made it a valuable tool throughout its history: Independence from infrastructures and, most of all, the skills of operators who know to establish communication links even under the most adverse conditions, making the best use of what is available at any given time. New technologies such as data modes and extensions to our services through interfaces with the Internet have added to our capability to serve as partners in emergency response. Skills acquired through the daily use of these tools help us in helping others in using whatever is available.

Over the past five years, hams have responded to major disasters – the Tsunami in the Pacific, the earthquakes in China, Italy and other countries, and the forest fires in Australia are just a few [examples](#). Emergency response is not possible without volunteers, and when it comes to communications, only we, the hams, can be these volunteers.

Communication means cooperation and coordination - and new mechanisms have been put in place. The annual GAREC Conferences have become the tool for the exchange of information and for a coordinated approach to the efficient use of our capabilities, and the GlobalSET exercises and more and more national exercises provide opportunities to test these capabilities.

The GAREC Conferences developed in just the same way as many local and national emergency communications activities: Somebody had an idea, a small group started an initiative, others joined when they saw the first results. There was and there is no need to "institutionalize" the GAREC concept. The IARU and its Regions participated in each of the so far 5 Conferences, but are not their organizers. Recently, the IARU Administrative Council Meeting now adopted the concept proposed in the [Statement of GAREC-2009](#).

IARU represents the interests of all radio amateurs, and emergency communications are an important element in our continuous efforts to maintain and, where possible, extend the privileges our service enjoys. For a variety of reasons it is not always the national IARU Member Society, who organizes and practices emergency communications. Ignoring the work of those specialized groups who work outside the Member Society would be counterproductive. We have to be aware, that the work in an emergency situation implies a number of aspects, which an IARU Member Society might not be able to handle; this includes in particular questions of legal responsibility. Affiliations and similar associations have in some cases been implemented very successfully. Wherever such a solution has not been found yet, the Regional Emergency Communications Coordinators and myself are prepared to assist in finding ways to allow the full use of Amateur Radio as a precious resource to the full extent.

Hams can not act alone: We can only be one of the many partners in emergency response. On international level, the IARU has therefore concluded agreements such as the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) the international Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Similar agreements exist with the United Nations and the ITU. They can serve as the base for cooperation on local, national and regional levels. A brochure, describing our capabilities as communication volunteers has now also been published and shall help when the potential partners are being approached. An IARU Handbook on Emergency Communications is planned as a next step - a project that will need your help.

I think that we are moving forward in the right direction. Let me take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to all who supported me in my work for the IARU and for the whole Amateur Radio Community over the past years. I am looking forward to your continuous inputs, new ideas, and initiatives, and, together with my colleagues in all three IARU Regions, I shall do my best to help wherever and whenever there is a need.

73

Hans Zimmermann, F5VKP / HB9AQS  
IARU International Coordinator  
for Emergency Communications

*Montrevel en Bresse, France, 1 January 2010*