

# Disaster

Sometimes, it's all about where you are on this world instead of who or what you are. At least, as far as it goes for danger from natural disasters. The planet we live on is not equally safe in every corner. There are many places that are much more dangerous than others. A fact of life that wouldn't cause big problems if governments in places, countries and regions with higher risks of natural disasters were able to take the necessary measures to contain the outcomes of possible floods, earthquakes, hurricanes or volcano eruptions. However, it also happens that most of the time the economic infrastructure in high-risk places is somewhat weaker than in other, safer regions. A catastrophe such as the Christmas tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean couldn't be prevented by a tsunami warning centre, such as the one that is in function in Hawaii in the Pacific Ocean region, simply because there is none. Also warnings via radio or television were not as effective as they would have been in other regions with a more densely organised communication network.

In the aftermath of the disastrous earthquake of 26 December 2004, one can only put some hope in the outcomes of the third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE III), which was held in Vienna in 1999. It's not certain at all that UNISPACE III would have proved to be useful in helping the poor people that were driven out of the coastal regions by tsunamis in several countries surrounding the Indian Ocean, but any co-operation between countries under the UN flag to make the whole world a safer place is to be encouraged.

In this issue of GIM International you can read about UNISPACE III. In this conference the basis was laid for further co-operation and development of possibilities to manage disasters with the help of all types of space-based technologies such as Earth observation satellites, meteorological satellites and global navigation satellite systems.

Following UNISPACE III, European, French and Canadian space agencies initiated the International Charter, which was later joined by the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA). Nowadays, with the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Argentine Space Organisation, the International Charter has become a truly worldwide organisation. Data of the International Charter have been used twelve times already, following, for instance, floods in the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Namibia and Nepal, earthquakes in Afghanistan, Indonesia and Morocco, and landslides in the Philippines.

For many people, sadly enough, help in the case of December 2004 came too late. Let's hope that in the future satellite imaging and other geo-information can help to prevent the disastrous consequences of natural catastrophes if possible or at least help to relieve the effects.