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# GDIN 2002

## ROME STATEMENT

### **TAKING OFF: GDIN's CONTRIBUTION TO HUMAN HEALTH, SURVIVAL AND WELL-BEING**

The fifth annual conference of the Global Disaster Information Network (GDIN) met in Rome from 17 to 21 June. The meeting, involving representatives from 29 countries, explored developments in information resources and management to identify key future activities for GDIN. At the meeting GDIN also successfully completed its transition from an informal association to a real international body. These developments will assist in reducing the ever-increasing human and financial losses from disasters.

Under the patronage of the President of the Italian Republic, representatives from around the world met at the Santo Spirito Monumental Building in Rome. The meeting of GDIN examined in depth measures to make best use of developments in information management and technologies to reduce the impact of natural and man-made disasters on lives, property and the environment.

The meeting strongly supported the continuation of conferences, workshops and fostering of working groups to examine specific issues. The participants also agreed to continue the excellent progress in the development of services that GDIN could provide, including:

- Providing comprehensive and timely advice to relief agencies on the impact of infectious diseases on their operations.
- Undertaking pilot projects.

Furthermore, the participants agreed to continue efforts in the development of other services, including:

- Developing early warning and response information service.
- Providing a comprehensive Internet portal for emergency managers globally.

The conference was characterised by strong and positive interaction between experts from national governments, industry, academia and international organizations, including the UN, OECD and EC. Such cooperation is essential for

more effective disaster prevention, mitigation, preparation, response and recovery.

ISS takes note of the relevant work on reshaping of GDIN, in a format that allows for a strong public health component as one of the outcomes of its action. While emergency management relies on a truly multi-sectoral approach based on multi-professional expertise, there is little doubt that reduction of avoidable morbidity and mortality stays as the major challenge. To achieve this not only technology and information systems development should be the core business for GDIN, but also proper communication and dissemination of information which is vital to support decision making under difficult circumstances such as those created by disasters. An additional objective for GDIN should be prevention, risk assessment and identification. This is the only way by which real progress and development can be achieved, although it is appreciated that this specific area is the most difficult and controversial, where evidence of effectiveness has to be properly assessed and disseminated. The production of best practices and a systematic meta-analytical review of current state of the art procedures, as well as of technologies, may contribute to justify further the GDIN mission in a high level international scenario, if supported by a properly designed social marketing strategy.

The conference was a watershed in formalizing GDIN with the approval of Bylaws and Management Structure. These provide effective processes by which GDIN can interact with its members and manage its business.

The conference expressed its gratitude to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and for the conference organizers: Italian National Institute of Health, US Department of State, Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Accademia di Storia dell'Arte Sanitaria, Italian Space Agency, European Space Agency, National Institute for Occupational Prevention and Safety and Italian Civil Protection Department. Thanks were especially given to Prof Angelo Capparoni, President Accademia di Storia dell'Arte Sanitaria, and to Dr Ranieri Guerra and his staff of the Italian National Institute of Health for the detailed support in development and conduct of the conference.

The next conference will be held in Washington DC in 2003 on the sixth anniversary of the founding GDIN conference in 1998. In the meantime, discussions are underway for the conduct of conferences and workshops in Latin America and Africa.

This successful Rome conference augurs well for the development of GDIN in the coming years which will see accelerated development of the organisation and its services.