



Telecoms at the Frontline

Jean-François Cazenave, President, Télécoms Sans Frontières, provides an insight to communications for disaster and to the most vulnerable communities on the planet



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Télécoms Sans Frontières' President co-founded the NGO in 1998 with Monique Lanne-Petit, TSF's Executive Director.

Before dedicating his life to TSF, Jean-François had already founded two other 'traditional' humanitarian organisations. He participated in interventions in Iraq (Kurdistan) in 1991, during the war in Croatia the same year, and more than 50 times in Bosnia Herzegovina between 1992 and 1996, then in Albania in 1997 and 1998. With TSF, Jean-François Cazenave led humanitarian calling operations and telecom support activities to the benefit of the NGOs and the United Nations agencies in Kosovo and Turkey (1999), in El Salvador, Peru, India and Afghanistan (2001) and in Syria and Iraq (2003) and from 2003 to 2013, in all major humanitarian emergencies (Syria, Mali, The Philippines, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Nicaragua, Haiti, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Madagascar to name but a few).

Jean-François Cazenave has managed TSF's emergency

actions in over 60 countries worldwide, assisting more than 800+ NGOs, UN agencies, rescue teams and hundreds of thousands of affected civilians, offering them free calls. TSF teams deploy on average 350 days per year.

On April 4th 2010, Jean-François Cazenave was decorated Chevalier de La Légion d'Honneur, by decree of the President of France, for his decades of work in humanitarian relief. Appointment to the Légion d'Honneur is the highest decoration in France.

Mr. Cazenave held positions as a civil servant and senior executive at the French public administration of postal services and telecommunications (PTT). From 1995 to 2001 he was city Councillor of Pau.

Q: Tell me briefly about Télécoms Sans Frontières, (TSF) your mission, and if that mission and the organization was created in response to an unmet need in Humanitarian Emergency Response, what was that unmet need?

A: Télécoms Sans Frontières' (TSF) story began during the 1st Gulf War in the Balkans and Kurdistan. The founders, who at the time were giving their time to general humanitarian aid, realised that in addition to medical and food aid, there was a critical need for reliable emergency telecommunications services. Conflicts and disasters often led to massive displacements of civilian families, meaning that people were separated from their loved ones. No communications structures were in place to help them find assistance or their family. To address the need for communications services, the founders bought their first satellite telephone in 1998 and from that very moment, the organisation was born. TSF soon found that the international response teams also had a critical need for reliable telecommunications services in the first days after an emergency. Therefore, TSF expanded its operations, improved its technology, and began to establish rapidly deployable emergency telecommunications centres to serve the various agencies of the United Nations, local and national governments and NGO relief workers. TSF

- ▶ thus developed a reputation as being the first responder on the ground following a given crisis - a reputation that is still present 16 years later.

Q: In many of the areas that TSF operates, the telecommunication infrastructure may not have been the best, even before a natural disaster or other crisis, isn't that true? And how do you respond to that particular challenge?

A: Télécoms Sans Frontières' role is to provide emergency telecommunications services for the period during which the given area's infrastructure is destroyed or saturated. At no moment does TSF intervene on the reconstruction of the telecoms infrastructure. TSF will remain in a given area until the terrestrial structure is re-established undertaking the following actions:

Telecommunications services are frequently disrupted during emergencies. Networks are often seriously damaged or entirely destroyed.

Once on the ground, TSF:

- (1) initiates humanitarian calling operations;
- (2) establishes multiple emergency telecommunications centres for first responders; and, where necessary,
- (3) conducts ICT assessments to assist with recovery planning.

Humanitarian Calling Operations

TSF deploys specialists to wherever survivors have found shelter and offers a free three-minute phone call to every family. These calls are frequently the first contact displaced persons have with the outside world. Affected civilians can get in touch with their family members, find medical assistance, access emergency housing and nutrition services and contact relatives to arrange for support or simply to let their loved ones know that they have survived.

Satellite-based Emergency Telecommunications Centres

Simultaneously, TSF specialists establish emergency telecom centres for emergency responders. The centres offer – at no charge – broadband Internet access, voice communications, fax lines and all the IT equipment needed for a field office. These centres enable emergency NGOs, the UN agencies, and local authorities to communicate right at the heart of a crisis. They also facilitate the coordination of aid efforts. First responders use TSF's telecommunications services to communicate vital information, stay connected with headquarters and other emergency responders in the country who are often spread across a wide geographic area. Information management and sharing has become critical for an effective humanitarian response. In 2013 in the Philippines, TSF put in place an internet centre, for the very first time to the benefit of the population. The success of the centre offered civilians a new way to communicate, beyond the traditional telephone call, meaning that information of their situation could be more widely diffused to their loved ones thanks to the means of social media.

ICT assessments

TSF rapid response teams also assist local governments and emergency response coordinators to perform ICT assessments of damaged areas. We use our ICT experience to assist these organisations in preparing to reestablish commercial networks or planning to build the ICT support infrastructure needed for the recovery stage following an emergency.

In these deployments to sudden onset emergencies related to natural disasters and conflicts, TSF also engages in other types of missions: UN support (IT support), UNDAC support (telecoms assessments and IT support), Satellite lines provision and Assessments.

TSF's structure - 3 deployment bases on 3 continents in Nicaragua, Bangkok and France as well as a representation the USA - is optimised to make sure all the world's time zones are covered 24/7 so that teams can intervene anywhere on the globe in less than 24 hours.

As specialists in humanitarian new technologies, Télécoms Sans Frontières is sensitive to the Millennium Development Goals and is committed to fighting against medical isolation, food insecurity and the protection of vulnerable populations. You can visit our website for further information on TSF's development projects.

Q: So how exactly does TSF conduct its mission? I would imagine you must coordinate with local governments, partner with international relief organizations, other NGOs, etc. Tell me about forming such relationships/partnerships.

A: TSF has a 24h alert and surveillance system meaning that we are ready to deploy at any given moment. In some cases (typhoons, for example), TSF is able to deploy prior to the occurrence of the natural disaster. TSF also deploys to certain conflicts in the case of mass population displacement. TSF is the official First Responder of the United Nations Emergency Telecoms Cluster - TSF works to support the other NGOs, UN agencies and local/national government agencies by providing telecom centres - a hub - equipped with high-speed internet and telephone connections - from which emergency responders can coordinate their priority actions during a disaster. Since its creation, TSF has served over 800 such entities. Once on the ground, TSF often collaborates with local operators to conduct humanitarian calling operations for the population (as specified above).

Q: A look at today's headlines, and obviously there is no lack of need for disaster relief, and other humanitarian relief undertakings. How well received has TSF's efforts been globally? Can you describe what you would consider one or two of your most successful efforts?

A: TSF is often the first NGO on the ground, making sure that the necessary services are in place in time for the arrival of other relief workers. In humanitarian crises, there are critical needs for food, water, shelter and healthcare. This aid would not be possible without fast and reliable telecommunication facilities. Rapid communications can save lives. In the same way as food and drug industries have naturally been supporting relief organisations ▶

- ▶ in their actions for the last 30 years, the same involvement from telecom and IT industries helps TSF to save lives.

When emergency strikes, most people's initial reaction would be to try and contact their loved ones. However, due to the destruction caused by such disasters, this is often not possible. Since its creation, TSF has reconnected over 1,100,000 people. Notable missions include the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 (63,000 people reconnected) Libyan conflict in 2011 (186,000 people reconnected). Since its foundation, TSF has intervened in 130 emergency response missions in 65 countries across the world.

Q: One cannot talk about any aspect of Emergency Response, without also talking about “Emergency Preparedness.” Tell me about efforts TSF is making proactively to try and improve a country’s Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) infrastructure in vulnerable areas, to prevent or minimize breakdown before disaster strikes.

A: TSF uses its expertise as the leading emergency telecommunications organisation to train other relief organisations as well as local and national government disaster response agencies in emergency response. In addition to preparedness training, TSF also provides emergency telecom kits to local relief organisations and training in their use. The kits include satellite communications and ICT equipment allowing relief offices to remain connected when the commercial infrastructure is down. TSF aims to improve the response capabilities of these groups so that they can, by themselves, use ICT when they face emergencies. This heightened response capacity allows trained actors to be operational in the hours following a disaster - the critical time during which the most lives are in danger.

For example, in 2013, TSF held four international training sessions during which over 100 representatives from a total of 66 iNGOs were trained in emergency preparedness. These sessions, alongside the many others that TSF has carried out, aim to:

- Increase the response capacities of local emergency workers
- Manage emergency telecoms in crisis situations
- Train local workers in ICT solutions
- Transfer knowledge and skills within participating organisations

More than 100 aid agencies have been trained by Télécoms Sans Frontières in emergency response.

Q: Tell me about your technology. What are the Satcom solutions and equipment you are using and why did you chose those particular platforms?

A: TSF's equipment is constantly upgraded: they are expanded and developed in response to the demands/needs that we encounter on the ground. The field of satellite telecommunications evolves very quickly; we are informed through our technical partners of all technological improvements and innovations, therefore we can take advantage of each improvement to become quicker to respond to emergencies, be more mobile and more efficient. TSF uses equipment with a worldwide coverage.

In order to be operational as soon as we arrive on the ground,

TSF uses the BGAN as a first deployment solution. The BGAN allows up to 20 devices to be connected to Broadband Internet and also offers voice and fax services. The BGAN is light (less than 4 kg) and mobile (deployable within minutes).

To improve the mobility of our humanitarian calling operations, TSF uses the ISatphone - recently upgraded to the ISatphone 2. This satellite phone designed to operate in extreme climate conditions delivers clear voice quality and offers the longest battery life among the products currently in the market (up to 8 hours talk time and up to 160 hours standby time). The ISatPhone offers a satellite telephone, voicemail, text and email messaging as well as GPS location data and tracking. Its dimensions and weight make it very useful for emergency calling operations.

TSF uses VSAT. A Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT), is a two-way satellite ground station with a dish antenna. VSATs are used when higher bandwidth is required and operations take place for a longer period of time.

Q: Obviously a mission like yours is expensive and like all Non-profits I am sure TSF has its share of funding challenges. How are you funded, and what can our readers do to help?

A: TSF is funded by both institutional and non-institutional partners.

Institutional: European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department, United Nations Foundation, the Town of Pau & the Region of Aquitaine & the Department Pyrénées-Atlantiques (when the HQ is based.)

Non-institutional partners from the telecoms industry: Inmarsat, The Vodafone Foundation, Eutelsat, the Airbus Group, PCCW Global, AT&T, Capacity Media & the IT Cup.

Donations can be made via TSF's website: www.tsfi.org

Q: We have talked about where TSF has come from, and where you are, how about where you are going. Where do you want to see this organization 5 or 10 years from now?

A: Télécoms Sans Frontières' objective is to continue to work on improving emergency response and coordination capacity worldwide through lifesaving mobile and satellite telecommunications. Since TSF's creation, the definition of 'emergency' has somewhat evolved, now encompassing a wider spectrum of disasters into which we incorporate mobile technology in the domains of health, nutrition, education and cash transfer.

TSF develop and implement numerous projects which will benefit affected populations, international non-government organisations and governments worldwide, whilst continuing to allow TSF to be the first responder in crisis situations and one of the world's leading emergency telecommunication training organisations. TSF has always adapted to the evolution of technologies and humanitarian needs. Consequently, TSF will endeavour to use lighter and more mobile equipment, generating even quicker response times in less than 24 hours.

For more information visit:

www.tsfi.org