

SOUTH AFRICAN CROSS-BORDER DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE

Ambassador Victor Zazeraj, SA National Department of Foreign Affairs

Ambassador Vic Zazeraj shared information with the delegates on how the Department of Foreign Affairs currently responds to requests for cross-border assistance, and the need for and development of a national policy on cross-border assistance.

The new Disaster Management Act gives a mandate for international co-operation and assistance in terms of Disaster Management. This mandate did not exist previously and cross-border assistance was co-ordinated in an ad-hoc manner after receiving such requests through the 24-hour Foreign Affairs Operations Room in Pretoria. The Department of Foreign Affairs have been involved in co-ordinating South African responses to requests for assistance in Iran, Algeria, Turkey, India, the DRC and Mozambique. A policy document is currently being framed within national government to address cross-border assistance to foreign countries who request assistance from South Africa in dealing with disasters. He indicated that the current way of working has certain weaknesses which will need to be addressed, and that all spheres of government and civil society will have opportunity to provide input to the policy document.

Mr Zazeraj committed himself to providing feedback on the progress with the policy document at the next DMISA conference, which is planned for 13-14 October 2004 at Gallagher Estate, Midrand, Johannesburg. He indicated that the conference will also be an opportunity for consultation on the contents of the policy framework.