



Telecoms at the Frontline

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



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Jean-François Cazenave, Télécoms Sans Frontières's 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 2012, in all major humanitarian emergencies (Philippines, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Lebanon, Nicaragua, Haiti, Kyrgyzstan, Libya, Madagascar...).

Jean-François Cazenave has managed TSF's emergency actions in over 60 countries worldwide, assisting more than 630 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 Councilor of Pau.

The idea for Télécoms Sans Frontières was the result of a simple observation made after many years of experience with general humanitarian charities, based on listening to those in need. During missions responding to the crisis in the Balkans and in Kurdistan during the 1st Gulf



War, TSF's founders realised that, in addition to medical and food aid, there was a critical need for reliable emergency telecommunications services. Conflicts and emergencies often led to massive civilian displacement and separated families. And affected populations are often left with no communications infrastructure in place to find assistance and loved ones.

Q: Tell me briefly about Télécoms Sans Frontières, (TSF) your history and the need that you fulfilled that was not being covered by other organisations?

A: Télécoms Sans Frontières was founded in 1998 by people who were working in general humanitarian actions. Our first operation was during the first Gulf War in 1991 and after that during the conflict in Croatia during 1992. After that we had 50 operations over 5 years in Sarajevo in Bosnia.

Every time we entered a refugee camp we were asked to take phone numbers with us to contact peoples relatives in the US or Europe, to let them know where they were, there Uncle was dead etc., they kept the phone numbers on a piece of paper in their shoes. We were providing comfort and news to allow relatives to get in contact and help their own families.

So in 1998 through these operations TSF, was formed, during the Kosovo War in 1991, President Milošević had 1 million people in refugee camps in Macedonia and Albania. They had three choices of where to go Medical Centre, Food Centre or our Mobile Satellite Centre. They all came to us to get messages out we had queues of over a kilometer, we had the worlds press come to see what was happening CNN, BBC etc.

We are now on operations 15 years and 325 days a year.

Q: Today a good part of TSF's operational mission is not only to provide and re-establish communications for the victims of conflict or natural disaster, but to provide reliable mobile communications for Disaster Relief Operations, tell me about that aspect of your mission?

A: TSF is working in countries like Haiti, Philippines and Indonesia, we train people so they can react most effectively in disaster or emergency situations, we also provide these people with the equipment to react to the situation.

We react to the disaster ourselves by being on the ground and operational within 24 hours, we have 3 regional bases Central America, Thailand and our headquarters in France, this geographically allows us to respond quickly.

If you take Chile or Haiti we were on the ground in less than 24 hours. The earthquake in Haiti struck at 5pm on the 12th January 2010 we were in Port au Prince, the capital, by 9am the following morning connecting the Airport, the UN Agencies Centre and the Ministries operational in 24 Hours.

If you take the Hurricane that happened last December we arrived before the hurricane hit a day before. We had the mechanisms to do this, the weather web information, and ▶

▶ the UN agencies on the ground so we made an informed decision to respond.

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 organisation 5 or 10 years from now?

A: I have been in charge of the organisation for 14 years now, we are deployed 325 days a year, it would be hard, no impossible, to do more than we are, so to continue for the next 14 years to be deployed 325 days a year is our aim.

Also to work in the poorest parts of the poorest countries to provide Internet satellite connection and through these links to provide community access centers before they even have road access. We are doing that now in Madagascar, Cambodia, Niger, Burkina Faso and Nicaragua for the indigenous Indian population.

We provide these centres to populations of over 10,000 people we can provide medical, educational, weather and local radio services. Some of these services are charged for, this allows the centre to build up funds to be self sufficient and after three years, when they are self sufficient, we then leave but we have provided all the technology free of charge.

The next challenge is to extend the ability to make mobile payments outside the GSM infrastructure and to provide this via a satellite bridge. We can activate payment, health services via a person's own phone where there is no GSM, Kenya has 50% of areas not covered we can offer the same services as operators in Europe etc. but out of coverage.

I think it is also important that we discuss what we are doing now we have been in Syria one and half years; we are connecting 12 hospitals and two internet educational centre's for children, one in Turkey for a thousand children and one in Syria for two hundred and fifty, these provide emergency education and connect the children with their friends and families. In Mali we have 5 telecom centres close to the Mali border.

For more information visit:

www.tsfi.org

