Dutch support for disaster zone phone software

April 13 2011

Software developed by Flinders University's Dr. Paul Gardner-Stephen which enables mobile phones to communicate during a disaster will be freely available to the public by the end of the year thanks to the support of the Dutch NLnet Foundation.

The Serval BatPhone software can be used on compatible mobile phone handsets to create an alternative "network" where conventional mobile phone coverage has been destroyed or simply does not exist.

Instead of relying on mobile phone towers, the Serval system relays calls for one mobile phone to another as either a "closed" network or to connect to a temporary tower.

Dr. Gardner-Stephen, Research Fellow (Rural, Remote and Humanitarian Telecommunications) in Flinders School of Computer Science, Engineering and Mathematics, said NLnet's contribution of about $40,000 would be a significant boost for his Serval Project team.

"We are delighted to receive the support of the NLnet Foundation, an organisation dedicated to supporting ventures and people that contribute to an open information society," Dr. Gardner-Stephen said.

"We currently have seven Flinders and INSA Telecommunications exchange students developing the Serval BatPhone software. They are getting valuable, real-world experience as they work on this integrated and substantial humanitarian software engineering project," he said.

“NLnet’s support will go towards project management and senior developer resources to more effectively manage the team’s coordinated efforts.

“It’s a significant step towards our goal of making Serval BatPhone freely available in a first public release later this year.”

Valer Mischenko, NLnet’s director said mobile communication have become an inescapable part of our lives.

“Unfortunately, existing systems relying exclusively on commercial operators’ networks can neither be called reliable enough, such as in disaster situations, nor secure enough, such as in circumstances of changing political situation - and they are not legally sustainable, as they are easily prone to various forms of cyber attack,” Mr Mischenko said.

“One may call the Serval system ‘an operator-less mobile network’, which can take over when operators’ networks fail for one reason or another. We are very glad with such initiatives which help to implement our mission and make networks based communication reliable and trustworthy,” he said.

More information: www.servalproject.org/

Provided by Flinders University