

# **ARF Workshop for First Response Support for Victims of Terrorism and Other Mass Casualty Events**

**22-23 September 2015  
Manila, the Philippines**

## **Co-Chairs' Summary Report**

### **Introduction**

1. As approved by the 21<sup>st</sup> ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Ministerial Meeting in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar on 10 August 2014, the Government of the Philippines hosted the ARF Workshop for First Response Support for Victims of Terrorism and Other Mass Casualty Events in Manila on 22-23 September 2015. The workshop was co-chaired by the Philippines and the United States and organized with assistance from the Global Center on Cooperative Security. The agenda, list of participants, and concept note for the workshop are attached as Annexes 1, 2, and 3, respectively.
2. The goal of the workshop was to bring together policymakers, practitioners, and first responders across the ASEAN region from the domains of (natural) disaster preparedness and management and those responsible for managing and coordinating responses to terrorist attacks. Participants included a total of sixty three (63) policymakers, practitioners, and first responders from sixteen (16) countries and five (5) international and non-governmental organizations. The meeting took stock of national and regional efforts on these fronts in Southeast Asia as well as international good practices in the area of first responder support to victims of terrorism and other mass casualty events.

### **Opening Session**

3. The Co-Chair for the Philippines, Undersecretary Rafael E. Seguis from the Department of Foreign Affairs, welcomed the participants. He described the Philippines as being one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world, but emphasized that the country is at the forefront of developing new modalities, mechanisms, and frameworks to better recover and respond to both natural and terrorist-related emergencies.
4. As part of his welcoming remarks, the U.S. Co-Chair, Mr. Darby Parliament, Southeast Asia Regional Counterterrorism Coordinator with the U.S. Department of State, informed the workshop participants that building partnerships and strengthening multilateral institutions like the ARF is a top foreign policy priority for the United States. He said that the Philippine workshop is part of an effort to help advance consideration of victims of terrorism, including in the Southeast Asia region, by taking stock of national and regional efforts and international good practices in disaster preparedness and crisis management, and building from those frameworks, mechanisms, and programs.
5. The Co-Chairs agreed that the growing scale and magnitude of emergencies and disasters require cooperation and coordination between and among all countries in the region and

their international partners. They also acknowledged the vital role of the international community in fostering understanding of the diverse needs of survivors, service organizations, and survivor-advocacy groups.

6. The organizers stressed that the meeting builds on a diversity of activity in the region on counterterrorism and disaster preparedness at the regional level under the auspices of ASEAN, the ARF, the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management, and APEC. The meeting, it was noted, is intended to advance the efforts of multilateral bodies, such as the Global Counterterrorism Forum and its *Madrid Memorandum on Good Practices for Assistance to Victims of Terrorism*. Specifically, the meeting builds on a workshop previously organized in Bali in 2013 that sought to situate those good practices in a regional context. It was suggested that this and subsequent meetings will help to further elaborate on the GCTF's good practices in this area and the discussions in Bali, in particular by sharing lessons from the field of disaster preparedness.

### **Panel I**

7. The first panel looked at national models and preparedness to respond to terrorism and other mass casualty events. Participants provided overviews of their national response systems, exchanged information on the key government agencies involved, shared information about their frameworks for the provision of victims' services, and highlighted special procedures for handling support to victims.
8. Participants highlighted various integrated crisis response systems and multiagency counterterrorism structures, including counterterrorism committees and fusion centers, which facilitate the sharing of information between agencies. Participants also considered how their disaster response and counterterrorism infrastructures interact.
9. In all cases, participants emphasized the importance of clear guidance designating lead agencies, noting that the lead agency will often differ depending on the nature of the incident, i.e., whether it is a terrorist attack or other mass casualty event. Participants noted that the responsible agency would also often differ depending on the severity of the incident.
10. Participants stressed the need to involve victims support at the earliest stages of a response to a terrorist attack or other mass casualty event. In that regard, participants acknowledged the need to train first responders on victims' issues and the utility of dedicated victims support officers and units that can work with first responders.
11. Participants also considered how victims of terrorism are similar to and different from victims of other mass casualty events and how that informs responses. It was suggested that lessons could be learned from frameworks developed to support victims of other types of crimes, e.g., human trafficking.

## **Panel II**

12. The second session looked at the medical, psychological, counselling, and financial support for victims after a mass casualty event. Participants discussed how the needs of victims in those regard change over the arc of a crisis response from emergency medical needs in the immediate aftermath, to medium and longer-term medical, psychological, and financial needs of victims.
13. Considerations for medical personnel in the immediate response to a terrorism or other mass casualty event include, among others, the safety and security of the scene, logistics, and casualty flow and evacuation. One of the most important decisions participants highlighted in that regard is deciding how best to administer medical treatment during the “golden hour” following traumatic injury when there is the highest likelihood that medical intervention will prevent death – whether to “scoop and run” or “stay and play” depending on the proximity and capacity of medical facilities and the number of casualties.
14. As the response transitions to recovery, it was noted that the medical needs of victims evolve and meeting those needs must be part of a broader, longer term support strategy. In some jurisdictions it was noted that expenses related to long-term medical care would be met by the state as part of universal medical care systems; in others, those costs would be borne by the victims, although victims’ funds and other charitable resources and compensation might be available to assist in defraying those costs.
15. In terms of the psychological and counseling needs of victims, mental health professionals stressed the importance of incorporating mental health care in the earliest stages of a response. They discussed the need for mental health “first aid” in the aftermath of a traumatic incident and need to link that with the provision of other vital support services.
16. Participants also stressed the need to look after the medical and psychological needs of first responders. In some cases, it was noted, first responders can themselves become victims of disasters and terrorist attacks or can overlook their own wellbeing in the process of caring for others. Participants stressed that counterterrorism and disaster response agencies need to look after the physical and mental health of their own first responders or they will be unable to help others.

## **Panel III**

17. The third thematic panel looked at information, communication, and media, with three presentations on the topic of media engagement and communication with victims, all of which emphasized the need to timely and accurately convey information to the media, victims, and their families in the immediate aftermath of a terrorist or other mass casualty event.

18. Participants considered the challenges around engaging with and managing the media generally in the wake of a terrorism incident or other mass casualty event. They noted the importance of quickly pushing out information to the media and public partners through arranged channels. This, it was pointed out, requires a quick assessment and collection of facts and standard operating procedures for dissemination.
19. They also highlighted the essential role that spokespersons play and emphasized that such individuals need to be credible, be empowered to share information, and be directly linked into the incident command structure.
20. Despite the numerous challenges in effectively engaging the media, participants stressed that it is essential, because if the media does not get information from official sources it will obtain it elsewhere.
21. Participants also considered information flow between first responders and victims specifically, which although similar to media engagement is in many important ways very different. One model discussed were dedicated family assistance centers which centralize and coordinate the flow of information to victims and their families. Participants shared important information about establishing and managing family assistance centers. Participants stressed the importance of trying to provide information to victims and their families first, before releasing it to the media and the need to be sensitive to and respectful of the families wishes whether to engage with the media.

#### **Panel IV**

22. The final thematic panel considered issues of interagency, interstate, and public-private coordination, as well as training and resources. Participants discussed the relevant actors involved in responding to and supporting victims and the bureaucratic and organizational mechanisms for coordinating among them. In terms of facilitating regional and international cooperation, participants highlighted the role that coordinating mechanisms through the UN and other relevant multilateral bodies can play.
23. Participants also discussed the important role that joint trainings can play in terms of facilitating interagency cooperation and for incorporating victims support issues into training for first responders. It was noted that in most jurisdictions victims support specialists reside within ministries of social affairs, but participants also acknowledged the potential benefits of providing victims support training to first responders more broadly.
24. Finally, participants emphasized the importance of coordination with private and nongovernmental actors, citing in particular the significant contributions of victims groups. It was noted that such groups can play a critical role in providing support to victims and their families, mobilizing resources on their behalf, and empowering victims to speak out against terrorism and violent extremism. Participants stressed that victims and representative of victims groups should be involved in consultations on this topic to share lesson learned.

## **Tabletop Exercise**

25. The final session consisted of a table top exercise in which participants were asked to consider issues around first response support for victims in the context of a mock scenario. The fictional scenario began with a fire at a hotel but included an “inject” which made it obvious the incident was part of a broader terrorism related incident.
26. The participants discussed special considerations that might arise in supporting victims, including security concerns, the provision of medical support to victims, evacuation of casualties, language issues, the need to engage foreign embassies/governments, and religious considerations, among others.
27. Participants also considered the order of their response and prioritized identifying the number and types of victims as a necessary first step. They discussed how they would manage fatalities, personal effects, injuries, notification of victims’ families, and what other entities and resources would be involved and how they would be coordinated.
28. After a facilitated debrief by each of the breakout groups, the exercise was followed by a presentation on lessons learned.

## **Conclusion**

29. The co-chairs thanked the participants for their excellent contributions to the discussions and to advancing the discourse on this important topic.
30. The organizers indicated that presentations, best practices documents, and other materials from the workshop would be made available through a password protected website or “expert network” to be distributed to the participants. The expert network is intended to help to facilitate continued interactions among practitioners on this and other relevant topics.
31. The meeting participants commended the co-chairs and the organizers for raising the issue, for helping to draw attention to an important yet underappreciated issue, and for their preparation of the seminar. The participants expressed appreciation to the government of the Philippines for their warm hospitality and excellent arrangements.