

**Co-Chairs' Summary Report of the  
ASEAN Regional Forum Cross-Sectoral Cooperation on  
Bio-Preparedness and Disaster Response Workshop  
Manila, Philippines, 11-13 August 2015**

## **Introduction**

1. Co-chaired by the Philippines and the United States, the 2015 ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Bio-Preparedness Table Top Exercise Workshop was held in Makati City, Philippines on 11-13 August 2015. The Workshop is a continuation of the project under the ARF Work Plan on Counter-Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC), approved by the 20<sup>th</sup> ARF in July 2013.

2. Participants of the Workshop from 17 Countries, Australia, Mongolia, Nepal, Viet Nam, Cambodia, China, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste and the United States of America, and the European Union attended. Expert speakers from agencies such as the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), ASEAN-GGP-Blue Dot, Department of Health (DOH), Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, National Defense Medical College, National Defense University, National Security Council, Pacific Disaster Center and Joint Program Executive Office – CBD also attended the Workshop. The Expert speakers are identified throughout this paper.

## **Opening Remarks**

3. Philippine Foreign Affairs Undersecretary for Policy, the Hon. Evan P. Garcia delivered the Opening Remarks where he shared his hopes and expectations for the success of the Workshop. He highlighted the primary deliverable from 2014 workshop –which was the development of a draft national guidelines template and the primary goals of the Workshop of testing, validating and refining the template through TTX and devising of plan of action and milestones. He emphasized that the Workshop is a continuation of several existing bio-preparedness and biosecurity exchanges in the ARF region. To put this into context, he mentioned the regional security threats brought about by extremist groups like Islamic State of Iraq and Syria in relation to their recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters, how they are transcending borders, and the support they receive once they get there. Aside from its stated objectives, he considers the Workshop as one more input to the ARF goals in the continuing global effort to ensure the security of the peoples and the peace and stability within the Asia-Pacific Region. He expressed his appreciation to the United States as the Co-Chair and the DOH and other participating Philippine agencies for their proactive efforts that contributed to the successful conduct of the Workshop.

4. Mr. Eric Kneedler, Political Counselor of the Embassy of the United States in the Philippines emphasized that both international cooperation and collaboration among concerned agencies at the national level, including public health, security enforcement, and disaster management, are crucial in tackling biological threats. He emphasized the significance and timeliness of the Workshop and hoped that it would result in a regional program to tackle biological threats.

5. The Workshop adopted the Agenda, which appears as **Annex A**.

### **ASEAN Mechanisms for Managing Pandemics, Emerging Infectious Diseases & Bio-Terrorism**

6. Navy Captain (Ret) Oscar Santos from the NDRRMC talked about the Philippine NDRRM System – what it is, how it works, its composition and the actions taken pertaining to the system. He emphasized on the collective efforts of the agencies involved, how vital preparedness and mitigation are in disaster management, and the need for the improvement and enhancement of every aspect of the response structure that is currently being utilized.

7. Dr. Troy Gepte discussed the ASEAN-GPP-Blue Dot Project. He advised on strengthening the ASEAN preparedness to Biological threats by enhancing regional capability in big data analytics and visualization. He mentioned how MERS-CoV and Ebola came knocking on the doors of nations last year. According to him, this prompted the improvement of protection, information dissemination and the capabilities to prevent the diseases mentioned to enter borders. He also shared the Analysis they made this year using the Bio-Diaspora web application to improve the actions that are being taken. He ended by saying that to work together closely and utilize the Blue-Dot System are what needs to be done.

8. Dr. Vito Roque of the Epidemiology Bureau of the Philippine DOH discoursed about the Asia-Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases (APSED). He emphasized on its focus on public health and how its partnership with others is a very important tool for its existence. He said that before the 2003 coming of SARS, the impacts of communicable diseases weren't felt as much. The following year, APSED abided with World Health Organization's development tool for International Health Regulations. Years from now, he envisions APSED to still remain relevant He reiterated on the presence of a collective journey towards a safer and more secure Asia-Pacific Region.

9. Presentations of speakers appear as **Annex B**.

### **Best Responses (Ebola, Bio-Preparedness and MERS-CoV)**

10. Mr. Thanh Le of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade talked about Australia's Ebola response in Sierra Leone and the Asia-Pacific regional preparedness. He emphasized on having prior working relationships with people or organizations you're going to negotiate with so discussions will be easier. He advised the delegates what he wanted all of them to discuss in the following days – identify the role of the private sector in what they do. He shared that the success of these efforts is by working together.

11. Dr. Wanabu Kinoshita, M.D., Ph.D. reminisced on the devastations that have faced Japan (i.e. tsunamis and earthquakes) in relation to bio-terrorism. He noted on the increasing threat of terrorism especially after 9/11 and the 2001 anthrax attack on the US. He enumerated Japan's actions against bio-terrorism, one of which is through the creation of medical countermeasures preparedness for diseases like the pandemic flu.

12. Dr. Lyndon Lee Suy from the Philippine DOH gave a speech on the MERS-CoV response of the Philippines. He provided an overview of MERS-CoV in general, amplified implementation efforts and that protection should be key not just in the hospitals. He echoed on the whole-of-society collaborative efforts because nobody can do it alone.

13. Presentations of speakers appear as **Annex C**.

### **Panel Discussion: Insights on Managing Pandemics, Emerging Infectious Diseases & Bio-Terrorism**

14. Dr. Richard Love and Undersecretary Vicente Belizario, Jr. co-moderated the panel discussions. Dr. Love in his introduction posed three challenges to the esteemed panel of speakers. Them being 1) limited amount of time to consider in the 10-15 minutes of speaking time for the speakers, 2) going beyond the tactical and thinking in terms of what this means and where ASEAN can fit in pandemic identification and response, and 3) dealing with the prospect of terrorism unlike last year where the fundamental concept is humanitarian disaster relief.

15. Dr. Lyndon See Luy stated that the consequence of having the 2014 MERS-CoV cases is the creation of the Executive Order No. 168 that formed an inter-agency task force for communicable diseases. He also elaborated on the tasks and responsibilities of each agency involved in the said EO.

16. Dr. Lupisan discussed on the “Preparedness and Response to a Pandemic or Emerging Infectious Diseases” and how the threat is real because infectious diseases are unpredictable, imminent and possibly inevitable. She emphasized the creation of the pandemic preparedness plan made in 2005 that has helped the Philippines track the spread of AH1N1 when it came to the country. She also shared some issues and concerns they face amidst having preparedness plans ready.

17. Dr. Morgan underlined that there is a need to emphasize the emotional issues and impact of pandemics which is usually overlooked when disasters are faced. He said that the mental health and well-being of people at large should be considered.

18. Director Clavejo talked about the National Security Policy of the Philippines and said that its role is to provide an enabling environment so development will happen. He mentioned that the “ends” of this policy is to ensure the welfare and well-being of people, and that the territorial sovereignty is protected.

19. Dr. Miranda tackled “Biosecurity within Comprehensive Security” and said that agencies are here to ensure effective preparedness response along with comprehensive security meaning, complete participation of each entity of state. He advised that there is a need to identify various entities beyond-health issues that transcend single-minded agencies/entities and not just focus entirely on health-related issues. He mentioned “One Resilience” which is not just a fancy terminology but rather something real that needs a combination of compassion and intellect leading to effective response.

20. Mr. Thanh Le encourages everyone to take the opportunity beyond the grass root level of being in a community and the ARF provides the platform to take advantage of it. He noticed that the ARF lacks innovation and challenged it to generate ideas/innovations for the community.

21. Dr. Oba talked about “Public Health Emergency Plan at Ninoy Aquino International Airport” and how it uses the 5-pronged strategy in controlling communicable diseases. He also emphasizes that it cannot be carried out by one agency alone. Partnership, constant coordination and collaboration among relevant agencies are imperative. He cited the NAIA PHEC Plan as an example of a ready and effective response.

22. Presentations of speakers appear as **Annex D**.

23. An open forum was held after the panel discussed their respective topics. Dr. Love started the forum with the question on each panel member’s lessons learned on their experiences with bio-preparedness. According to the panel, the key to an effective response is transparency, openness, giving frank and fearless advices, debriefing of involved people, having a good preparedness plan and management strategies. Dr. Love and Undersecretary Belizario, Jr. both summarized the forum. Dr. Love highlighted four focus points: 1) management, 2) communications, 3) leadership and governance, and 4) stress management. Undersecretary Belizario, Jr. also added four additional points: 1) highlighting existing national policies and lessons learned, 2) noting the good practices, 3) keywords of the forum were cooperation, partnership and participation, and 4) need for coordinating mechanism and venue for engagement.

### **Other Mechanisms for Managing Pandemics, Emerging Infectious Diseases & Bio-Terrorism**

24. Mr. Peter Colvin of the Pacific Disaster Center (PDC) gave an overview of the PDC and how it uses an integrated approach which includes PDC’s internet-based Decision Support System (Disaster AWARE -- All-hazard Warnings, Analysis, and Risk Evaluation tool), capability building and evidence based info products that inform leader decisions, operational planners, and humanitarian assistance missions. He emphasized open source bio-surveillance and support to regional information sharing.

25. Ms. Kathleen Brodwater of the Joint Program Executive Office – Chemical & Biological Defense (JPEO-CBD) presented the Bio-Surveillance Portal tool. She identified the lack of a single source for bio-surveillance tool for situational awareness, preparation and response as a problem JPEO-CBD is trying to address. She highlighted some of the challenges with finding data, accessibility and information sharing agreements. According to Ms. Brodwater, JPEO-CBD envisions building a global tool for all bio-threats that provides: unclassified web accessed system; incorporates PDC’s DisasternAWARE tool; collaboration, analysis tools, brokered data, M&S, Data Access and Security (credential based content, controlled access); ability to exercise development.

26. Presentations of speakers appear as **Annex E**

## **Best Practices: Hong Kong (SARS)**

27. Mr. Peter Morgan, a SARS Operations Expert, shared his experiences in the 2003 Hong Kong SARS Response. He emphasized on the importance of a timely risk communication system and massive support from other people and agencies. He gave the good, bad and ugly consequences of the SARS breakout. The good results were the heightened preparedness/awareness and the presence of the can-do spirit of people as well as the continuation of the cleaning efforts. The bad consequences were the high death toll, working environments became dangerous for health workers/responders in fear of being infected as well as massive economic slump. The ugly results were paranoia, mass outbreaks and high human costs, mostly due to suicides.

28. Presentations of speakers appear as **Annex F**.

### **Table Top Exercise**

29. Dr. Holly facilitated the Workshop. The table-top exercise divided the participants into four breakout groups. Participants in each group took on the role of a regional bio-preparedness task force. The task force was to recommend courses of action to national governments to deal with the global spread of a novel coronavirus MERS 2 outbreak. The Bio-Preparedness Guidelines was provided so that the participants can test and refine the template – what should be added, removed as well as to identify provincial, national and regional impediments and authorities. The draft template appears as **Annex G**.

30. After the exercise, heads of delegations met at the Senior Leader Seminar and discussed the template in general. The following are the points of discussion of the senior meeting:

- a. Need to pursue the legal aspects of bio-preparedness and its different definitions and authorities to apply across the region and give an opportunity for intercessional discussion;
- b. How information will be shared with other nations. What does a common operational picture look like?
- c. The measurement and assessment of the effectiveness of the capabilities, actions and plans per nation; and
- d. Challenges of how ASEAN countries may help not just each other but also others in the international community should the need arises.

31. After the Table Top Exercise, the participants were asked to share the outputs of their breakout sessions. They found the template generally useful, with each group having their own suggestions and recommendations but with similar points identified as follow:

- The need to identify a lead coordinating nation or regional chain of command;
- Members and leaders' awareness and understanding of the available tools and capabilities of each nation as well as of the legal policies and enablers; and
- The template should not only focus on health issues but also on bio-attacks.

The breakout groups' outputs appear as **Annex H**.

32. An impromptu panel and TTX synthesis was held after the sharing of the breakout group representatives. The panel basically discussed the need for information sharing, identifying leadership, incorporation of all partners not part of the ASEAN, and assessment of nations for research and surveillance of their regional threats.

### **CBRN Projects**

33. Eugenia De La Torre, Scientific Project Manager with the EU enumerated the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence Risk Mitigation Initiative. These included the aim to reinforce CBRN policy and regional cooperation, building partner capacity at a regional level, address local and regional needs, increase safety and security, and have an approved legal basis. The approach to risk mitigation is voluntary/regional and the need for network support and implementation of regional projects. She also informed the group of the upcoming ARF Workshop on "Raising Awareness and Promoting ARF Cooperation on CBRN Risk Mitigation" to be held on 9-10 September 2015 which will be co-chaired by the Philippines and the EU. Presentation appears as **Annex I**.

### **Closing Remarks**

34. Major General Michael Compton, Air National Guard Assistant to Commander of the Pacific Air Forces gave the closing comments on behalf of the United States of America. He said that the stability and security in the Asia-Pacific region is the entire world's interest. However, another biological event is inevitable which will remind us of the bigger events that tell us to act now. He gave three keywords to be remembered: prepare, prevent and response. He urged everybody to "continue pushing ourselves to see" the events not only on a local perspective but in a regional and global perspective as well. He stressed the importance of strategic communications and regional cooperation. He ended by sharing that the challenge now is to push the 23<sup>rd</sup> ARF to continue to challenge them for bio-events in the future.

35. Director Daniel Espiritu of the APSC Division, Office of ASEAN Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs, spoke on behalf of Assistant Secretary Luis T. Cruz. He touched on the 48<sup>th</sup> founding anniversary of the ASEAN and the milestone it has reached this year as "it pursues regional integration and builds a community." He also highlighted the three-day workshop and how this engagement allowed the ARF nations to get together to learn from the subject matter experts shared their expertise and experiences in their respective fields. He noted that this is another crucial follow-on event geared towards prosperity and peacefulness of the community that the Philippines envision as it prepares to host the 2017 ASEAN Golden Year. He concluded by thanking all delegates for their attendance and active participation.

## **ANNEXES**

Annex A – Opening Remarks

Annex B – TTX Agenda

Annex C – Presentations of the ASEAN Mechanisms for Managing Pandemics, Emerging Infectious Diseases & Bio-Terrorism

Annex D – Panel Discussion: Insights on Managing Pandemics, Emerging Infectious Diseases & Bio-Terrorism

Annex E – Other Mechanisms for Managing Pandemics, Emerging Infectious Diseases & Bio-Terrorism

Annex F – Best Practices: Hong Kong (SARS)

Annex G – Bio-Preparedness Guidelines Template

Annex H – Breakout Groups Presentations

Annex I – Presentation on CBRN Projects