

Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief

Oliver Lacey-Hall
Head, OCHA Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide some inputs for this important inter-sessional meeting on disaster relief. In Padang last year I provided an overview on some of the strategic issues that we are collectively facing when it comes to humanitarian coordination and disaster relief. Since that meeting there have been a number of significant developments, which are having a direct and largely positive impact on humanitarian coordination and the delivery of disaster relief in this Asia Pacific region.

In the next few minutes I would like to elaborate on some of the work that we are involved with in the context of the coordination of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and to put forward some thoughts in preparation for the 2015 ARF-DIREX.

But firstly, I wanted to provide some feedback on the 2013 ARF-DIREX exercise. We are grateful to the Republic of Korea and Thailand for their open and collegial dealings with us in preparation for and execution of this exercise. A number of key issues emerged, the most important of which is making sure that we are adequately prepared. The table top exercise that I facilitated together with colleagues from the Republic of Korea and Thailand provided some salient recommendations that bear repeating here today:

For those of us on the providing end there is a need to:

- Understand and respect the affected country's disaster response management structure and procedures;
- Within those procedures, and in line with regional and international agreements and protocols, coordinate with other incoming countries and organizations including by:
 - Establishing and maintaining contact with the EMERGENCY point of contact in each country;
 - Complying with existing agreements on disaster response such as AADMER.
 - Being able to provide a timely list of available capacities and capabilities to support affected country;

Countries that accept international assistance need to:

- Provide clear, written guidance for public dissemination on their laws, regulations and procedures, especially around arrangements for the welcoming, receipt, processing and distribution of incoming regional and international humanitarian assistance.
- Operationalise national disaster response management legislation, providing a clear point of contact, explanation of the structure and process to coordinate and facilitate incoming assistance, both civilian and military; from regional partners and/or the international community.
- Clearly articulate the types of humanitarian assistance and technical support that are required in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. Much of this work can and should be done as part of response preparedness actions.
- Strengthen civil military coordination in disaster operations making use of prevailing national, regional and international guidelines, including the "Asia-Pacific Regional Guidelines For The Use Of Foreign Military Assets In Natural Disaster Response Operations".
- Ensure "Quality, accuracy, coherence and timeliness of information" for affected people (national and foreign), media, donors, embassy regional and international organizations. This includes through social and digital media.
- Improve baseline data and build capacity on disaster needs assessment
- Support and utilize relevant research studies on disaster response and management.

The relevance and centrality of these recommendations was further demonstrated earlier this month at the Cobra Gold Exercise 2014 that was held in Thailand. The fact that very similar recommendations and

outcomes to those of the 2013 ARF-DIREX exercise were formulated during the after action report of CG2014 is not surprising and reinforces the fact that we need to work harder and in a more joined-up manner to ensure that our collective efforts are as effective as possible. Inserting this into the planning for the 2015 DIREX will be important.

Secondly, and leading on from the recommendations coming from the ARF DIREX we're very pleased that we have been able to engage robustly with the tenets of the AADMER - and especially Annex 1 - which describes the role and functions of the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Coordinating Centre.

Shortly after last year's inter-sessional meeting in Padang we held a two day workshop with our colleagues at the AHA Centre to map out how we can most effectively work together to complement and support each other. Thereafter, at the 2013 ARF-DIREX the UNDAC and AHA Centre/ERAT teams worked alongside each other. Since then we have cooperated on the training of the third round of ASEAN/ERAT staff , worked closely together in response to a number of disasters across the region and engaged fully in the process of learning lessons on how we can work together most effectively for the benefit of the people who have been affected by disaster and crises.

Staff from my office are working with AHA Centre colleagues this week in Jakarta to identify lessons upon which we can build from the response to Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda. A lot needs to be done - and I can confidently report that we are forging highly productive and cooperative relationships with our ASEAN colleagues.

Broader cooperation between ASEAN and the UN on disaster management issues also continues in the context of the annual ASEAN-UN Summit meetings. Implementation of an updated set of activities under the ASEAN-UN Strategic Plan on Disaster Management is now under discussion - with a gathering of the concerned UN agencies with the ASEAN Secretariat due to take place in a few weeks.

Thirdly, you may recall that at last year's meeting, I spoke to you about the conclusions of the Humanitarian Partnerships Workshop that was held in Shanghai in 2011. In November last year we held the fifth Regional Humanitarian Partnerships Meeting in Thailand¹. The Forum was a platform to launch the document that had been requested at the 2011 Shanghai meeting - the Guide for Disaster Managers on International Response Tools and Services².

The Guide provides an accurate snapshot of what international and regional tools and services are available today, but my hope is that it will also provide scope for identifying gaps, duplications, redundancies and areas for improvement. Such feedback has to come ideally from you, both as ARF Members, but primarily as Government officials who are involved in leading disaster management activities in your respective countries. Lest we forget, the likes of the UN, NGOs and international donors, are present only to assist and augment all the work that you already do. You lead. You own. We support.

The key conclusions of the 2013 Forum resonated strongly with the recommendations from the TTX at the ARF DIREX.

On RESPONSE the existing capacity of the international system to respond to emergencies must be safeguarded to ensure that tools and services remain deployable, particularly for the large-scale disaster situations that are likely to occur in the region. As a logical extension of this recommendation, the pool of staff trained to support and to use these tools and services should be enlarged and strengthened. National and local disaster managers should benefit from familiarization workshops and trainings designed to increase their understanding of how and when international and regional tools and services could most effectively be called upon to supplement national efforts.

Also on RESPONSE, efforts to enhance the inter-operability of international, regional and national tools and services should be intensified where possible. This conclusion was intended to promote more systematic

¹ [https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/ROAP/Promotional%20Materials/Partnership/RHPF%20Summary%20Report%20\(FINAL\).pdf](https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/ROAP/Promotional%20Materials/Partnership/RHPF%20Summary%20Report%20(FINAL).pdf)

² <https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/ROAP/Promotional%20Materials/Disaster%20Response%20in%20Asia-Pacific%20-%20A%20Guide%20to%20Intl%20Tools%20and%20Services%20202052013.pdf>

reflection on the interplay between tools and services held at the various levels (national, regional and international). As a suggested way forward, OCHA will propose the establishment of a regional steering group on interoperability, which will be tasked to (i) develop a regional calendar of training and simulation exercises, and (ii) organize regular consultative learning exercises (i.e. wash-ups) to consolidate the lessons learned from joint training and exercise participation and make recommendations to support enhanced interoperability.

On PREPAREDNESS the view was that international humanitarian organizations should enhance their work on supporting the development of national capacity for preparedness for response, and OCHA should ensure that such efforts are adequately coordinated. To this end, OCHA should promote improved preparedness for response by continuing its ongoing work with humanitarian country teams, and enhancing its support to national authorities through capacity building in priority areas. Work is underway in Bangkok to improve coordination of preparedness work amongst international humanitarian organisations. This work is being jointly led by WFP and OCHA.

On POLICY related issues the capture of lessons learned, including both best and worst practices, from the Asia-Pacific region, should be strengthened and made more systematic in order to facilitate experience sharing among different parties, including Member States, international, regional and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, academic institutions and affected communities. More discussion is needed on this - especially in light of the EAS initiative to capture lessons.

Folding the outcomes of these lessons into the deliberations around the upcoming World Humanitarian Summit³ in 2016 and the regional consultation for North and SE Asia (scheduled to be held in Japan in July this year) will be important.

Fourthly, I am pleased to be able to update you on the outcome of the 2012 *Regional Civil-Military Coordination Guidance Harmonization Workshop*, in December 2012. The purpose of that event was to finalise the discussions around the harmonization of existing and emerging guidelines for civil-military coordination, primarily in disaster response operations, in order to ensure that such guidance supports accepted principles, acknowledges best practice and does not compromise response operations.

The workshop was used as the platform to launch the final '*Asia-Pacific Regional Guidelines for the Use of Foreign Military Assets in Natural Disaster Response Operations*'⁴, which were a product of the APC MADRO series of conferences between 2006 and 2011. These guidelines are currently available in Indonesian, Thai and English. They will be kept updated by OCHA and regional partners and revised as required as a living document. Should ARF members require translation of the guidelines into their language ROAP would be happy to support this.

Fifthly, and finally I wanted to return to the issue of simulation exercises as we start to think about the 2015 ARF-DIREX. The 2013 exercise was a solid example of how bringing countries together to exercise pays dividends. Clearly, simulation exercises are key to the success (or failure) of our preparedness work. For us they are a built-in element of OCHA's Minimum Preparedness Package where we use them as a tool to test the various components of preparedness support and capacity building that we provide, to measure the overall impact of interventions, and suggest follow-up preparedness activities to be undertaken.

Beyond this simulation exercises can help participants develop confidence in their skills and provide experience of what it would be like to use established plans and procedures in a real event. **But** if they are not developed jointly by all the key stakeholders that would be involved in an emergency response then their impact is likely to be limited. We need to make sure that the following are engaged in the development and execution of simulations:

- National Governments and their officials, who can make sure that the exercises are “anchored in reality” and developed taking into account national preparedness plans and legal frameworks.
- Representatives of countries that would like to provide international assistance to affected countries. The ARF DIREX is a best practice in this regard.

³ <http://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/>

⁴ <https://docs.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/Guidelines-APC%20MADRO-%20Final.pdf>

- Regional organisations - which, in this region and others, are playing an increasingly important role in both coordination and delivery of disaster relief.
- The so-called “international humanitarian community”, which can contribute with the provision of realistic scenarios and injects on principled delivery of humanitarian assistance, as well as on the possible use of international tools and services.
- Military actors, which provide their unique expertise in problem-solving related to security, logistics, communications, manpower, discipline and incredible speed.
- The private sector can provide insights into how it can effectively engage in preparedness, response and contribute to getting people and things back to a semblance of normality as quickly as possible.
- Academia can support us in learning from past experiences and help us develop or enhance frameworks and mechanisms that we can jointly subscribe to and implement in order to reduce communities’ vulnerability to shocks and crises, with the ultimate aim of improving the effectiveness of emergency preparedness and response efforts.

We also need to ensure that we work *together* to share expertise and discuss what we learn from each exercise in such a way that we are not constantly re-inventing the wheel. To be frank I am surprised by the number of events we are invited to attend where there is limited understanding of how, for example, civil-military coordination works and is governed. We need to ensure a much broader buy-in from those involved.

For me one of the best ways to do this would be to considerably increase coherence between the various simulation exercises that take place in this region of the world each year so that we are putting scarce resources to best use, so that we are making sure that the collective rehearsals we undertake during peace time can really *be used* when we are faced with the sort of calamity we saw in the Philippines in November last year.

The big question is, of course, how do we better join up simulations - and how do we do it in such a way that there is national and regional ownership of the findings of the various exercises. How do we reach common agreement that, if we are to increase the value of simulation exercises we need to do more to really implement the lessons from both simulations AND real time response events?

I don't have an answer to these questions - but we're certainly not short of institutional capacity to think this through. We've just completed the 6 year process to develop the APC MADRO Guidelines. Should the next step in that process be to look at better harmonisation and coordination of civil-military exercises and the process that needs to more effectively draw them together? Is this maybe a role that the ASEAN Secretariat or the ARF can take on? OCHA would be keen to provide support with regard to international elements of this work.

My final suggestion would be that we need to better highlight the added value of agreed regional principles and standards such as the APC MADRO Guidelines in establishing an overall and harmonized framework that can be used to provide that much needed narrative line across simulation exercises. In this perspective, my office is considering taking the lead in the organization of a civil-military coordination conference in the last quarter of 2014 that would facilitate the dissemination of the APC MADRO Guidelines and contribute to the much needed further alignment and harmonization. BUT - these are not OCHA's guidelines - they belong to us all - and so support in publicising and disseminating them would be warmly appreciated.

I trust that these few comments have provided a useful illustration of some of the strategic coordination issues we are working on. Once again, thank you for the invitation to speak here today. We very much appreciate the ongoing dialogue between the ARF and the United Nations on disaster relief and humanitarian assistance.

Thank you