

ARF INTER-SESSIONAL MEETING ON DISASTER RELIEF

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Strategic Coordination Mechanisms for the Humanitarian System

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Mr. Chair

Members of the ASEAN Regional Forum,

Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for the opportunity to provide some inputs for this important inter-sessional meeting on disaster relief. In Brisbane last year I provided a brief overview on some of the strategic issues that we are collectively facing when it comes to humanitarian coordination. Since that meeting there have been a number of important and significant developments, which are having a direct and largely positive impact on strategic coordination mechanisms in this Asia Pacific region. Perhaps the most important thing that we need to ensure is the need to ensure that these developments build on rather than replace what has gone before - and in this we count on the continuation of the excellent partnership already established between the ARF and its international and regional humanitarian partners. On the part of the OCHA we are committed to playing our part and have taken steps in several ways to make sure that the very real realignment of disaster relief coordination that is now taking place in this region is supported by international humanitarian organisations.

In the next few minutes I would like to elaborate on some of the work that is going on in this context:

Firstly, and most immediately, OCHA has been providing some direct support to the 2013 ARF-DIREX exercise, (which is happening really soon now!). We are grateful to the Republic of Korea and Thailand for their open and collegial dealings with us - and also for encouraging the trial of new ideas in pursuit of the best exercise possible. With support from AusAID and USAID, ROAP and FCSS will run a four day On-Site Operations Coordination Centre, or OSOCC, training course for ARF members from the 3rd to the 6th of May- directly before the actual exercise. Each ARF member is invited to send one participant to the training, which will focus on how to make best use of tools provided by the international system to support national coordination in large scale disaster response operations. Subject matter experts in response operations and urban search and rescue will come from around the world to facilitate the training. Thereafter OCHA and its partners will set up and run an OSOCC throughout the DiREx FTX, in partnership with AHA and the ERAT team, to support the exercise.

Secondly, we're very pleased that we have agreed with the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Coordinating Centre that we will hold the first in a series of meetings later this month, the purpose of which will be to share our mutual experiences on disaster response coordination and to work out where and how we can most effectively work together. More specifically the process aims to:

- Provide AHA Centre colleagues with OCHA's perspective on coordination in the context of the international humanitarian system, including available tools and services, legal framework and the operational opportunities and constraints of coordination and discuss these tools from the perspective of their utility value to the AHA Centre;

- Begin the process of developing better mutual understanding of the AHA Centre's and OCHA's responsibilities during disaster response operations in the ASEAN region;
- Develop a forward agenda for discussion of areas requiring further clarification, delineation and cooperation, such as UNDAC/ERAT, AHAC/ERC, etc.;
- Agree on a modus operandi for both working and high level consultations on a regular basis and prior to and during emergency response deployments;
- Agree a rough timetable to hold specific follow up workshops and/or consultations on specific thematic areas to ensure greater understanding and coordination among staff of both organizations.

Thirdly, you may recall that at last year's ARF inter-sessional meeting, I spoke to you about the important conclusions from the Humanitarian Partnerships Workshop that was held in Shanghai in 2011. Four main action points stemmed from this meeting, namely:

- i. OCHA to lead in drafting a Guideline for the humanitarian community and Member States to accelerate preparedness and response;
- ii. OCHA to lead in writing a Guide for Governments (and National Disaster Management Authorities in particular) on how to access the tools and services available from the international humanitarian system;
- iii. The Guidelines in Action Points 1 and 2 should also include a section on the use of technologies to support disaster preparedness and response;
- iv. Based on the OCHA/World Economic Forum guidelines on public-private partnerships, OCHA should lead in drafting a strategy for increasing engagement with the private sector in support of disaster preparedness and response.

As a way to follow up on the first three action points above, OCHA embarked on the process of drafting a concise document entitled "Disaster Response in Asia and the

Pacific: A Guide to International Tools and Services”. This “Guide” is now in the process of being finalized, after extensive consultations with countries across the region, as well as regional organizations (ASEAN, SAARC, SPC, etc), UN Agencies, Red Cross and NGOs. This has resulted in a document that provides a comprehensive, yet concise reference that disaster managers can use to know which international tool or service can be accessed during both the response phase of a disaster as well as in disaster preparedness. In addition, the Guide gives an overview of the international humanitarian architecture as it currently stands, both in terms of the major international actors, as well as the basic policies and laws that are governing it today.

The Guide provides an accurate snapshot of what is available today, but my hope is that it will also provide a 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. Over the course of the year, we hope to have a number of opportunities both regionally and in your country to get feedback on the Guide and the tools and services provided for your use. In particular, we are aiming to have a follow-up Regional Humanitarian Partnerships Workshop in October/November this year in which we will review this Guide, in which your Governments will be invited to participate. We look forward to your active engagement.

Fourthly, OCHA hosted a *Regional Civil-Military Coordination Guidance Harmonization Workshop*, in December last year, which brought together over 50 civilian and military personnel from 16 Member States in Asia and the Pacific and from the UN, IFRC, ICRC and NGOs. The purpose of the event was to discuss 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 issue at hand is clear - after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami there was a significant increase in civil-military guideline development by numerous actors intended to facilitate military assistance to disaster response operations. Whilst these various efforts are highly commendable, and serve a very real purpose, a lack of harmonization in existing guidance and in the development of emerging guidance may become problematic if not acknowledged and addressed. The risk is that rather than being developed as mutually supporting and in accordance with internationally accepted principles, a proliferation of guidelines, applying in some cases to certain groups or across certain geographic areas, may confuse rather than facilitate disaster response operations.

The Workshop agreed that:

- the accepted principles and concepts of civil-military coordination need to be consistent through all levels and types of guidance, but are not currently.
- There is a need for greater collective advocacy and awareness-raising for civil-military guidance - and this is urgent.
- There is a clear requirement for a more comprehensive strategy to promote and disseminate guidelines through regular training for both military and civilian personnel, and that
- Stricter sourcing and referencing in guidelines development would lead to greater harmonization through correct attribution.

The workshop was cited as an example of good practice in providing a platform for multi stakeholder dialogue on civil-military guidance harmonization. Participants suggested that OCHA ROAP make this an annual event, which we are aiming to do.

Following final consultation and field testing over the last 2 years, and guidance from participants, 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*', which were a product of the APC MADRO series of conferences between 2006 and this year, and which have until now been 'draft' whilst undergoing testing and evaluation. The guidelines will be disseminated by the end of March following final revision. They are currently available in Indonesian, Thai and English. They will be kept updated by ROAP 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, international and regional humanitarian organisations have been working on implementation of a series of measures emanating from the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's transformative agenda for humanitarian response. I briefed on these developments at last year's meeting. In terms of a brief update, in this region, humanitarian agencies have focused primarily on two areas emanating from this agenda:

We all agree, I think, that **preparedness** is part of effective response - or perhaps response is an effective outcome of good preparedness. Making sure that international capacities for response are understood by national disaster managers is essential - hence the development of the guide that I just spoke about. But beyond that there is a clear need to ensure that international organisations are making ourselves available to work

with national planning for disaster response, especially in those countries that are highly prone to disasters.

To this end the regional inter-agency standing committee (which includes pretty much all of the UN agencies, international NGOs, red cross and regional national NGO coordination bodies) is taking a hard look at how we are organising ourselves to most appropriately align our work with that of national disaster management offices, and our colleagues at ASEAN, SAARC and beyond. However, we need to go beyond thinking about this to really coming up with some concrete work. OCHA has been working closely with WFP (chair of the regional IASC working group on preparedness) on an initiative that links national, regional and international logistics response planning for a number of countries in the region. We are aiming to pilot some of this work in Nepal this year and broaden its scope in 2014.

We also see that there is clear consensus on ensuring that effective, efficient and appropriate humanitarian response and related provision of help is based on clear communication with people who have been affected by disasters. Recent disasters in Japan, the Philippines and Thailand have highlighted the transformative impact that social media and mobile networks are having on disaster management, both in raising new opportunities and creating new challenges for organizing and implementing disaster responses. Humanitarian agencies - whether national, regional or international need to forge new and innovative partnerships, especially with local and national NGOs who are the front line of this area of response. OCHA is supporting the development of a regional network, bringing together partners from the technology, social networking and telecom sectors with humanitarian organizations.

This network is primarily about developing partnerships that will enable humanitarian operations to get life-saving information to people, and to channel their voices to

assistance providers. Through the network, it is hoped that country networks can be formed, which need to be led by you - the Governments, working closely with national NGO counterparts.

We've been working closely with the Government in the Philippines to pilot incorporating communications with communities into coordination work, including determining the cost/benefit of engagement in this sector for preparedness, information management and planning for large scale response. A country network had just been established when Typhoon Bopha struck in early December and we were able to move quickly and create a communications with communities group in Davao. Key priority areas for communication include:

- Connectivity and the ability of survivors to talk to each other and their families including with relatives overseas
- Early warning and risk awareness: the hillsides in Compostela Valley are saturated with water and are prone to landslides and flash floods, so these remain ongoing hazards
- Access to information about services
- Basic information about hygiene and disease prevention, especially related to water purification and home treatment of illnesses such as acute watery diarrhoea

In Myanmar, work is underway to address the perceptions of bias that exist within communities in Rakhine State about the role of the UN and NGOs. A study was undertaken that found much work needs to be done by the humanitarian agencies to better communicate with various community groups to raise awareness of our role and activities. If we engage with communities now, in the towns, villages and in the camps, we will be able to address some of the misconceptions that currently exist. More importantly, open communication channels will prevent new grievances flaring up as

humanitarian operations continue in Rakhine. Humanitarian agencies need to learn from this experience.

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 with this important forum.