

The Use of Military Assets in Humanitarian Response to Natural Disasters

The devastating economic and social impact of natural disasters particularly in the Asia Pacific region were again starkly demonstrated throughout 2009 - severe flooding in Manila, followed by a tsunami hitting Samoa and Tonga, and a strong earthquake in Sumatra, Indonesia.

These disasters serve as a reminder that the Asia Pacific region is both home to the greatest number of natural disasters affecting up to 60% of the world's population, and that the coordinated use of civil and military assets in disaster management is a reality.

It is expected that the economic and social impact of natural disasters will increase given changes to climate, population growth and growing urbanisation.

The Asia Pacific Civil-Military Centre of Excellence (the Centre) contributed to the Conference on the Use of Military Assets in the Humanitarian Response to Natural Disasters at Wilton Park (UK) 28-30 September 2009 in cooperation with the Civil-Military Coordination Section (CMCS) of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance in Hawaii (US Pacific Command), the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

When military assets are to be deployed in the aftermath of a disaster, planning and coordination between civilian and military responders is essential. However, many practical issues associated with civil-military coordination need to be addressed.

Although the [Oslo Guidelines](#) for the use of military and civil defence assets in support of humanitarian activities were revised in 2005/6, continuing work is required to develop more effective coordination mechanisms, improve pre-deployment training, conduct joint exercises, and develop shared guidelines. The role of the military in disaster risk reduction also needs to be addressed.

The full [Report on the Conference is now available, read here.....](#)

In response to consensus among agencies of the need to strengthen relevant international guidelines, the Centre is actively addressing these needs in our region.

4th Asia Pacific Conference on Military Assistance to Disaster Relief Operations (APC-MADRO) in Honolulu, Hawaii.

In addition to the Wilton Park Conference, the Centre also led an Australian delegation to the 4th APC-MADRO Conference in Honolulu, Hawaii, in September. The Centre had previously chaired the 3rd APC-MADRO in Australia in 2008.

The Conference was Co-chaired by CMCS from UNOCHA and the Centre for Excellence from US Pacific Command. The Conference was attended by 17 regional countries and eight multilateral and non-government organisations.

The Conference sought to finalise the ***Guidelines for the Facilitation of Foreign Military Assistance to Disaster Relief Operations in the Asia Pacific Region***, to be considered and endorsed by Asia Pacific countries at the national decision-making level.

The Australian delegation's successful participation contributed to ensuring appropriate recognition was given to the first response capabilities of the region's militaries in dealing with natural disasters, and the recognition that when agreed by host affected countries such assistance is most beneficial when it is used early and is well coordinated with civil agencies. A strengthened reference was included in the draft Guidelines encouraging the need for closer civil-military coordination.

At the conclusion of the Conference, consensus was reached among delegations on a revised version of the draft Guidelines and on a way forward in having them endorsed at the national decision-making level.

The next APC-MADRO Conference is expected to be held in 2010 to endorse the Guidelines and lay the foundation for a further improvement in the delivery of assistance to regional victims and survivors of natural disasters.