

As delivered

**Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and
Emergency Relief Coordinator Valerie Amos
Statement at Jakarta International Defense Dialogue:
Military Operations Other Than War**

Jakarta, 21 March 2012

Thank you very much, and good afternoon everyone.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
My fellow panellists,

It's a real pleasure to be here at the Jakarta International Defence Dialogue, which this year is looking at the challenge of delivering peace, security and stability in our world. Other speakers have alluded to the importance of working to deliver political stability, and about the negative impact of conflict in many countries and regions.

I would therefore like to focus my remarks on the way that security and stability can be disrupted by natural disasters, undermining economic growth, and exposing the fragility that sometimes underpins a natural disaster response and indeed can stretch national capacity to its limits. In those situations, it is very important that we work together to deal with the consequences of disasters.

It is often said that Indonesia is the nature's laboratory for natural disasters: earthquakes, tsunami, forest fires, floods, whirlwinds and drought. And add to this rising sea levels and rapid urbanisation. And we can all see that Indonesia has much to teach us about how to prepare for and recover from such events.

For further information, please contact:

Kirsten Mildren, OCHA Regional Spokesperson, mildren@un.org, Tel. +66 2288 2856, Cell +66 819151276

Denis Okello, OCHA Indonesia, okellod@un.org, Tel. +62 3141 308, Cell +62 8119 105 847

Clare Doyle, OCHA New York, doylecm@un.org, Tel. +1 212 963 5009, Cell +1 646 228 6331

We have already been reminded of the inter-connectedness of our world, which has some real practical benefits in the way that we do our business. Natural disasters have humanitarian consequences and they don't necessarily respect national boundaries. Their impact can be felt nationally, regionally and globally. And that's why we - in the humanitarian community - rely on our partnerships with a number of partners around the world, particularly with our military partners in the immediate aftermath of sudden-onset natural disasters. We deeply appreciate your support and your commitment to helping the most vulnerable in times of crisis.

My organisation - the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs - was set up twenty years ago by the General Assembly of the United Nations to improve the international disaster response in both natural and man-made emergencies.

Essentially, our job is to make sense of the chaos, which often ensues. A crucial part of this work is to ensure that there is positive and productive coordination between civil, civilian and military actors in humanitarian crises.

Our coordination role is based on some key principles. First and foremost, the safety and security are an essential basis for humanitarian action: for the survival and dignity of vulnerable people; to make sure that we have unimpeded humanitarian access; and, indeed, for the safety of relief workers themselves – most of whom are nationals of the countries where we work.

It is also important that we recognise that military forces can play an important role in ensuring that safety and security, and that we make the humanitarian response more effective if civil-military coordination works smoothly.

The interaction between humanitarian workers and the military can range from cooperation to co-existence, depending on the operating environment. But at a minimum, it is essential that we maintain the dialogue.

Around 70 percent of our work is driven by the consequences of conflict, which is a particularly complex environment for us to work in. But I am not going to discuss this here, because a growing proportion of our work is also driven by global trends including climate change, the food crisis - which caused huge insecurity across the world. We saw that last year in the Horn of Africa, and I hope we don't see it too much this year in the Sahel - unsustainable population growth and demographic shifts causing more people to live in high-risk areas; increasing urbanization; and shortages of land, water and energy.

In the Asia-Pacific region, the focus of our work is on preparing for natural disasters and responding when they hit. This is the world's most natural disaster prone region. We are working with Member States and our regional partners - in ASEAN, SAARC and elsewhere - to strengthen both national and regional capacity and to improve coordination. We also work with humanitarian partners and military forces to strengthen coordination through international agreements.

So how is our civil-military coordination working right now?

I

The mission of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is to mobilize and coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors.

[Celebrating 20 years of coordinated humanitarian action](#)

I think that the good news is that we have some successful models and strategies for cooperation.

A year ago, we saw the largest national and international military deployment of 2011 in the response to the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami, when the Japanese Self Defence Force deployed more than one-hundred-and-five-thousand servicemen and women. They were joined by some twenty thousand American forces and teams from Australia, South Korea, India and many other countries.

In Pakistan, the development of national civil-military guidelines contributed to creating a successful civil-military interface after the floods of 2010, allowing quicker and more efficient decision-making.

But a lack of prior understanding or agreements can lead to confusion. It can lead to ineffective coordination structures and to delayed decision-making. We saw that very clearly in the response to the Haiti earthquake in 2010.

So while we know what works, we have to also adapt to a changing world, and indeed adapt to what we know works to the particular countries and contexts, in which we work in. We have to change our thinking and our models to prepare for and respond to disasters in the most effective way possible.

One recent change is the reformed humanitarian system put in place by UN agencies, our NGO partners, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and others with better coordination across sectors – like health, nutrition, water and sanitation. We are focusing on stronger partnerships, on quicker and more predictable financing, as well as on ensuring that there is more effective leadership on the ground.

The success of Japan's response effort was partly due to that country's membership of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group. Japan was familiar with what was available from the international community by way of support. They were able to use that support as part of the national-led response effort to the crisis. In this region, we are seeing more and more the emphasis on national ownership, through strengthened partnerships at the national, regional and international level.

Regional bodies are becoming increasingly involved in the coordination of disaster management and emergency response efforts, including by building operational capacity, such as ASEAN's contribution to the response to Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar.

We, in OCHA, play a key role in building and maintaining these links. And we believe that the dialogue should be broadened and expanded from the government level to involve local and international partners.

Locally, there is room for the involvement of actors below the state level, including non-governmental bodies and the business community. Stronger links between civil society and the military can create more space for preparedness and prevention measures to be developed. This is one aspect of disaster response that starts well before a disaster

The mission of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is to mobilize and coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors.

[Celebrating 20 years of coordinated humanitarian action](#)

happens. You in the military have the resources, the speed and the expertise. And might I also add: You have the discipline. Civil society can offer the best and quickest way to reach people on the ground.

At the international level, mechanisms are being developed to paying more attention to coordination in preparing for and responding to disasters. We welcome the initiative to draw up regional guidelines for the use of foreign military assets in natural disaster response operations.

Singapore, with OCHA, organized the first Asia-Pacific Conference on Military Assistance to Disaster Relief Operations in October 2006. And in the 5 years since then we have seen over 30 countries in the region involved in that process. They have contributed to the deliberations of the issue and there are now draft guidelines. But there is a danger: The development of competing sets of guidelines by the ASEAN regional forum, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and others could lead to confusion.

We need to work together to make sure that this doesn't happen. And of course, we need to make sure, that guidelines that are being produced are building on the Oslo guidelines. Agreement on the provisions of roles and responsibilities is particularly important because it helps all of us to make the best use of the resources available. It means that we can respond more efficiently and more effectively.

We rely on all of you and on our strong collaboration to make our collective response more cohesive and more effective. Sharing ideas, pooling resources and working together are in all our interests, and crucially, will help us saving more lives in future.

I feel that we have a strong basis for effective coordination. Let's build on it as we move forward.

Thank you very much.