



## **Blue Helmet Forum Austria 2011**

International Disaster Relief Assistance – What Role for the Military

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The Blue Helmet Forum 2011 took place at the Austrian National Defence Academy in Vienna and the Austrian Forces Disaster Relief Unit, NBC Defence School, Korneuburg from 21-23 Sep. 2011.

The welcome remarks were given by Günther Greindl, General (ret.), President of the Austrian Association for Peacekeepers. General Greindl wished the forum to focus on natural disaster rather than complex emergency relief. Further remarks were given by LTG Erich Cstkovits, Commander of the National Defence Academy and MG Johann Pucher, Head of the Directorate General for Security Policy of the Austrian Ministry of Defence. Further key speeches were given by Hansjörg Strohmeyer from the UN OCHA and Asif Yasin Malik, LTG, and Commander of 11 Corps in Pakistan.

**Session: Practical Experiences, chaired by Alois Hirshmuigl, BG and Directorate General for Security Policy of the Austrian Ministry of Defence.**

BG Hirshmuigl's first mission was in Mozambique in 2000, where floods had devastated local people. He talked about the fact that in larger disasters, foreign governments should offer their forces to assist affected areas. Before doing that, those responsible for the mission should make sure that everything needed is available. BG Hirshmuigl also laid down important questions including; is the military assistance appreciated in the region or is it seen as an invasion? How does it work and what is the reality on the ground? In some cases, humanitarian organizations do not like military presence. In the last 10-12 years, the situation changed significantly – Mozambique 2000, Tsunami



2005, Pakistan 2010, Haiti 2010, Japan 2011, etc.)

The other important question he raised was whether the military should be used in humanitarian disaster as a last resort (first and only resort??). To this question, BG believes that the military should be the last resort to support humanitarian operations. Troops should be used when civilian efforts are not available or not enough. Military support must be complementary and not replace the normal one (civilian). Finally, military forces should be utilized to fill the humanitarian gap.

Further, BG referred to the following documents as guidelines for humanitarian disaster relief efforts: the Oslo Guidelines which were the result of a collaborative effort that culminated in an international conference in Oslo, Norway, in January 1994 and were released in May 1994; the Military and Civil Defence Assets (MCDA) Guidelines which are guidelines to support United Nations Humanitarian Activities in Complex Emergencies of 2003;

BG concluded saying that in eight (8) of his mission, he never had a problem with other foreign military forces. The discussion about whether military use in disaster relief effort is the last resort is ongoing. He also noted that the leadership of civilian in emergency relief efforts is accepted by the military. Finally, cooperation between military and civilian relief units is necessary.

**Rudolf Müller, Chief Emergency Services Branch, UN OCHA, Geneva.**

After many years working in different fields of emergency relief, Mr. Müller assumed the post of Chief of Emergency Services Branch with OCHA Geneva on 24 March, 2010. In his presentation, Mr. Müller concentrated on the coordination of the emergency relief operations. The USG for Humanitarian Affairs, currently led by Ms. Valerie Amos is the responsible body of the UN Secretariat for coordinating all humanitarian assistance.

Among the key actors is OCHA whose responsibility is to solicit support from and assist member states in mobilizing international assistance (including MDC when relevant) when the scale of disaster exceeds national capacity. Mr. Müller explained the process management of OCHA as follows: first, a disaster happens on a national level and the population is affected; second, the national government requests for international assistance; third, the international assistance is mobilized and managed by OCHA.

**Session Humanitarian Actors chaired by Dr. Kurt Bergmann, co-founder “Nachbar in Not (Neighbour in Need, an Austrian NGO active in crisis situations)”, Austria.**

Among the speakers of this session was Dr. Wolf-Dieter Eberwein, President Voluntary Organizations in Cooperation in Emergencies (VOICE), Brussels. He addressed the issue of how should the NGOs and the military work together in humanitarian relief operations. Many NGOs are reluctant to work with the military because they do not want to be seen as delivering emergency services for other reasons other than humanitarian. For them, emergency service is more than a service, it is a humanitarian gesture.

The risks to humanitarian organizations have increased due to the perception that they are another force of western ideology. The problem is not who, how, or when to deliver the emergency assistance. The problem is neither military nor humanitarian organizations. The problem is politics. Military and civilians are confronted by political bureaucracy that makes their humanitarian jobs very difficult and inefficient.



He believes that the direct emergency relief should be provided by humanitarian organizations because their role is to provide humanitarian assistance. Mr. Bergmann also doubts that military reaction in disaster response is faster than civilian.

**Session: Military Actors chaired by LTG, MoD Christian Segur-Cabanac**

LTG Segur-Cabanac is Director of General IV/MoDS Austria and Deputy Chief of Defence Staff of the Austrian Armed Forces. He elaborated on the role of the Austrian Armed Forces in humanitarian disaster relief and the rising number of disasters (natural, technological or ecological) as well as the increasingly complex crises that can no longer nowadays be controlled by a few traditional humanitarian organizations alone. In addition to the rising number of civilian actors, military forces have been increasingly employed for tasks such as the earthquake in Taiwan in 1999 since mid-1990s.

The military's role within the frame of international humanitarian aid and disaster relief is primarily to support civilian authorities and relief organizations in the areas of disasters, in accordance with the internationally recognized *Oslo Guidelines*. Military sources are to be used only if there is no civilian alternative or if the tasks to be performed exceed the capacities of the civil rescue teams on site. The Austrian Armed Forces mainly deploy the Austrian Forces Disaster Relief Unit (AFDRU), which has a modular structure, and the trained disaster relief experts of the Austrian Armed Forces within the framework of the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC). AFDRU is the only Austrian unit for humanitarian relief operations and it has 200 forces always ready to be deployed whenever needed.

### **LTG Asif Yasin MALik, Commander 11 Corps, Pakistan – Role for the military.**

LTG Malik based his presentation on the question of when and where to employ military forces. Armed forces can be employed in all types of humanitarian disasters whenever the civilian actors are not able to deal with the emergency. General Malik went on to explain in details, the role of the Corps (11 Corps) he is in charge of during the Pakistani floods of 2010.

He concluded by laying down the following recommendations:

There should be a rescue database; a regional Taskforce should be created

There should be a united command under the UN; there should be more training for the rescue jobs

There should be an after-mission report

There should be mutual agreement between military and civilian in disaster operations

### **BG Vincenzo Puri, Director Logistics EU Military Staff, Brussels – An EU perspective**

BG Puri started emphasizing that the EU humanitarian relief efforts are under the leadership of civilian organizations. The military is only one element of the operation and it does not seek to take the leading role.

The question “what role for the military” is a much debated issue at this time, following events over the last 18 months in Haiti, Pakistan, Japan, and elsewhere. International guidelines are of a considerable importance, but require specific interpretation for each scenario, as different actors



approach crises from varying standpoints and with different perspectives.

The EU has a unique and highly influential position within the international humanitarian sphere. It is the world’s largest humanitarian donor financially and has the ability to deploy civil protection, police and military capabilities on a global basis, alongside EU’s political and diplomatic instruments.

Whilst international guidelines regarding the use of military in humanitarian domain are based on the “last resort” principle, the EU considers that this does not mean “never” nor does it mean that a military component will be considered last. The key is to develop military capabilities that compliment a civilian effort and to ensure comprehensive planning and command and control structures in order to make sure that the right military capabilities are deployed at the right time and in the right circumstances, in support of EU civilian led humanitarian operations.

### **MG Simeon Trombitas, CDR US Army South, United Nations – Joint Task Force Haiti (Operation UNIFIED Response)**

MG Trombitas outlined the mission, contributions and challenges for Disaster Relief / Humanitarian Assistance Joint Task Force. In addition, he discussed operational priorities for the JTF and the observations from his experience as JTF-Haiti Commander.

### **Visit to AFDRU, NBC Defence School, Korneuburg**

COL Michael Schuster, Commander NBC Defence School gave a briefing and practical introduction to the School, followed by expert demonstrations of rescue operations and water purification.