



Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (COE-DMHA)

Pandemic Influenza Workshop Focusing on Reconstruction and Recovery held in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (July 2, 2010) – In conjunction with the Sri Lanka Ministry of Health and Sri Lanka’s Disaster Management Center, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) held the “Pandemic Influenza Reconstruction and Recovery (WHO Phase 6)” workshop from June 28 to July 2. The multilateral workshop, involving several countries, focused on improving military support to governments during a pandemic.

“This workshop focuses on rural and domestic recovery activities during the UN World Health Organization’s [WHO] Phase 6,” said Andy Bates, the workshop lead. Bates works for the U.S. DOD’s Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (COE), which is executing the workshop. According to WHO’s definition, Phase 6 is a pandemic defined by sustained community-level outbreaks in two or more countries in one WHO region, and at least one other country in another WHO region.

Bates added that the workshop has “specific emphasis on working with people with disabilities or limited means of caring for themselves in a crisis for the long-term, working with livestock and other working animals, and supporting relief organizations that come to the host nation to provide support.”

“Disadvantaged people include those in hospitals, the elderly and orphans,” Bates said. During times of crisis in any community, these populations can be overlooked and face considerable hardship in caring for themselves, especially in long-term crises like a pandemic. Livestock, an important source of income for rural communities, can also be overlooked as well. Both issues are challenges to the recovery of communities.

“The planning assumption for WHO phase 6 is that between 35-45% of the workforce will be absent. Those people will be sick, caring for sick family members or too afraid to come to work. Based on that planning assumption, military support to critical infrastructure will also be examined,” added Bates.

US Ambassador to Sri Lanka Patricia A. Butenis gave the welcoming remarks, along with Dr. Ravi Ruberu, Secretary of the Ministry of Health, and Major General (Ret.) G. Hettiarachchi, Director General of the Disaster Management Center.

Sixty-four participants from 13 South Asian and Asia-Pacific countries attended, including Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Laos, Malaysia, the Maldives, Mongolia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

“The workshop enables Sri Lanka highlight all its current activities and pandemic plan for its neighbors,” added Bates. “This is also the first time that COE is able to return to Sri Lanka in many years, and we are very pleased to be able to resume activities.”

Speakers included those from the UN WHO, World Food Program (WFP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), as well as the Sri Lanka Ministry of Health.

The workshop is part of a series that COE is executing in nearly a dozen Asian nations from 2010 to 2011. The series works to bring international civilian training, containment, planning and laboratory standards to the region’s militaries, many of which will be expected to respond to a deadly global pandemic.

The series is being executed as part of an inter-agency agreement between the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD).