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ECHO.B - Humanitarian and Civil Protection Operations
B/1 - Emergency Response

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Subject: Outcomes of Technical and Operational Level Lessons Learnt Meeting on 19 October 2015

This document summarises outcomes and lessons identified from recent Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) missions, as well as Commission presentations and discussions on the development of a framework for UCPM advisory missions.

1) Summary

The meeting revolved around lessons identified from recent UCPM operations with a key focus on the response mission to the Nepal earthquake and coordination with UN in emergencies outside Europe. In addition, the Commission (COM) presented an overview of recent emergencies and debrief from the last Forest Fire season. Outcomes of the UCPM advisory mission further to the floods in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia were also presented. Participants agreed on strengthening the role of the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) as a coordination hub between humanitarian aid and civil protection.

The meeting was attended by 30 participants from 19 Participating States (PS), 6 EU Civil Protection (CP) experts - team members from recent EU CP missions, as well as representatives from UN OCHA and DG ECHO.

2) Overview of recent UCPM activations

Migrant/Refugee crisis

COM provided an update on the response to the ongoing refugee crisis. COM recalled the existing financial limitations under the UCPM due to the nature of the available EU funding instruments intended to support activities outside the EU. PS were invited to respond to the letter of Commissioner Stylianides from 24 September 2015 regarding possible Member States' contributions to tackle the refugee crisis. The ERCC is in charge of organising and coordinating inter-service meetings within the Commission, and with external stakeholders and producing maps of the migration routes for analytical and operational purposes. DG ECHO has released EUR 1.5 M funding for assistance in the refugee crisis and another EUR 200 M for 2015 EUR 300 M for 2016 for the countries of origin of the refugee crisis.

Hungary activated the Mechanism and 6 PS contributed to the request. The emergency is now closed. A request for assistance from Serbia on the refugee crisis is ongoing. Three PS have offered assistance.

Ebola outbreak: ERCC coordination meetings are still ongoing. Whilst Liberia has been declared ebola- free, the rest of the affected West African countries are still facing new cases, albeit very limited in number.

Ukraine: Further to a UCPM advisory mission in the first half of 2015, recommendations were delivered to the requesting state. COM is awaiting feedback for the Ukrainian authorities on proposed actions for the implementation of these recommendations. In relation to the ongoing Polio cases in the country, COM is holding internal consultations. Ukraine has requested EUR 8 Million of international assistance, of which DG ECHO will contribute EUR 2 Million.

The ERCC monitored the Monsoons and Cyclone in Myanmar over the summer and landslides in Guatemala. Monitoring of the situation of the Koppu cyclone in the Philippines is ongoing. While no request for assistance has been received, DG ECHO has dispatched staff from Bangkok for a rapid assessment mission.

3) Strategic framework and developments regarding LL programme.

- At the LL meeting on 24 June Advisory Missions (AM) were discussed, as a related activity to this meeting, a technical expert meeting will take place on 20 October, to further discuss and explore different elements of the AMs.
- The plan is to divide the process of the Advisory Mission into more operational elements: **pre-mission, mission and post mission phases** with clear tasks and roles. These are to be identified and respective guidelines and documents drafted within the coming months.
- Development of web based tools in order to share information (minutes, documents, presentations) is under consideration;
- New Director General of ECHO has requested a follow-up on the Nepal activation within the next 6 months.

4) General overview of the forest fire season:

The last forest fire season was relatively calm with one activation of the Mechanism in response to the forest fires in Greece in July. The Greek request for assistance led to the first mobilisation of the Voluntary Pool for forest fires which allowed a higher financial contribution of 85% for transport cost of assistance. COM reminded that two firefighting planes in total are now at the disposal of PS under the Voluntary Pool. In addition, four requests to the ERCC for satellite mapping have been made.

Some PS stressed the challenge of regular reporting during time-critical forest fire emergencies. COM suggested as an existing best practice that the requesting country fills in a checklist with key information items including affected area, terrain and landscape specifications, historical data etc. PS are invited to make use of the checklist and share it for further consideration by other participating countries. Updating the checklist on a regular basis during emergencies is encouraged, preferably on a daily basis.

Weekly videoconferences with the most fire prone PS and the Joint Research Centre (JRC) have been held, allowing increased knowledge sharing and also better risk prediction / awareness. Forest Fire experts were provided from PS to the ERCC to increase monitoring capacity. This exchange proved to be positive in enabling PS to obtain a better understanding of the functioning of the ERCC.

5) UCPM advisory mission to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

In August 2015, heavy rainfall in the country caused river flooding and landslides leading to severe damage in urban areas and 6 deaths. The UCPM was activated on 6 August, with a request for assistance in assessing the cause of the damage and for recommendation on flood and landslide prevention and risk mitigation. From 13 to 26 August, a EUCPT was deployed with expertise in geology, landslides, water and sewage systems, civil engineering and urban planning. The team was deployed in the recovery phase to assess geological, geomorphological and hydrological conditions (characteristics of water courses) and to check dams and to estimate water levels. The final report has been sent to the Government of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and will be shared in due course with PS through CECIS.

Lessons Identified:

- Assessment/advisory missions need more time for preparation and roll-out than response missions. Sufficient time need to be assigned for the report drafting on the ground.
- The expectations on the assessment outcome need to be clarified and agreed with the requester before the start of the mission
- Various assessments were ongoing on the ground without prior knowledge. Cooperation between parties would avoid duplication and ultimately producing different reports with different findings.
- A short fact-finding mission to prepare the ground and establish connections with the relevant host nation support structures may improve the understanding for the deployment of the remainder of the team.

6) Nepal earthquake: cooperation between UCPM and ECHO humanitarian aid experts

- DG ECHO Humanitarian Aid:
 - *A quick response after the occurrence of the emergency. Technical Assistants were sent to Nepal with two national staff to provide expertise and cover the first needs. EUR 3 Million Euros allocated. In total EUR 12 Million; three tranches released for shelter, health, WASH, medical supplies, non-food items. Nepal was a good example of positive experience for the coordination between Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection.*

Challenges and Lessons Identified:

- ECHO Technical Assistants were not immediately aware that the ERCC was in contact with the EU Delegation since the beginning of activation of the UCPM.
- Coordination between Technical Assistants (TA) and ERCC/CP experts has greatly improved, however there is still room for improvement especially for the technical expertise (see engineers);
- In such emergencies there is a great opportunity to improve the in-house ECHO cooperation, from the request for assistance to the elaboration of a joint plan, e.g., there were too many teams treating water;

7) UCPM response to the Nepal earthquake and field cooperation with UN OCHA

Situation overview

A powerful earthquake hit Nepal with a magnitude of 7.8 on 25 April, 2015 and a State of Emergency was declared by the Nepalese government the same day. Significant seismic activities continued for over three weeks with a further 7.3 magnitude aftershock on 12 May. The UCPM was activated in parallel, from both UN OCHA and the Government of Nepal.

A United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team was deployed as well as a UCPM team. Although coordination took place it was decided that this would not initially be a joint deployment. This disaster attracted intense media attention possibly contributing to a strong international response. Overall, 54 international teams were mobilised and 60 countries participated in the response phase.

Kathmandu airport soon became a bottle neck in the response operation; regionally based response teams and civilian scheduled flights had priority landing rights over other international relief flights. Additional problems at the airport arose due to the limited parking and ground handling capacity; moreover the runway was damaged due to overweighed aircrafts. Consequently, there were additional delays in obtaining landing permissions.

Several countries experienced problems in obtaining landing permissions in the Kathmandu airport and they had either to abort their deployments or delay their arrival in the affected area, having held off in neighbouring countries.

The UNDAC team was deployed from Bangkok and arrived quickly despite the difficult conditions. The team received continuous support from the OCHA regional office in Bangkok. They set up an On Site Operations Coordination Centre (OSOCC) in the vicinity of the UN building and a Reception and Departure Centre (RDC) at the airport to register incoming international teams, provide information briefings and direct teams to the OSOCC.

The OSOCC module supplied by DEMA/IHP was delayed, due to the bottleneck at the airport, and not fully operational during the first week of the response. The OSOCC staff was drawn from UNDAC, other UN organizations and NGOs, when fully operational this amounted to 76 persons. On 17 May, the last team left handing over to UN OCHA.

UCPM response

On 25 April, the requests for assistance from UN OCHA and the Nepalese Government were communicated from the ERCC to PS via CECIS.

Between 26 and 29 April two ERCC Liaison Officers (LO) and ten team members were deployed with a mandate to facilitate the coordination of incoming assistance from PS and to support the Nepalese authorities in assessing the situation.

Following the initial response, two new team members and a new ERCC Liaison Officer were deployed to work embedded in a UN humanitarian hub structure together with UNDAC. The first ERCC LO arrived 8 hours before the rest of the team and was able to establish good relations with both the EU Delegation and ECHO office in New Delhi.

ECHO Humanitarian Aid and UCPM Team worked jointly from the outset. A joint reporting protocol was established, further resource sharing in terms of vehicles, language and accommodation was

initiated and a single media strategy was agreed. Relationships with the Nepalese Minister of Foreign Affairs were maintained throughout.

Despite initial planned activities the UCPM team played an active role within the OSOCC, notably providing extra capacity to the UNDAC Reception and Departure Centre (RDC). Attendance at the following Cluster Meetings also increased overall coordination: Logistics, Health, WASH and Foreign Medical Teams (FMT). The UCPM team cooperated with the OSOCC in order to fill gaps, especially in remote locations outside of the capital.

In Charatara and Gorkha, the UCPM Team allocated personnel to support the delivery of humanitarian assistance. This was done in close cooperation with UNDAC, the local government and humanitarian organisations. It demonstrates a good example of operational cooperation between EUCPT and UNDAC.

UCPM Participating States Response Operations

The first response operations from UCPM Participating States focussed mainly on Search and Rescue, Health, NFIs, Water and Sanitation.

UCPM PS defined their deployments from the requests channelled through the ERCC. While these requests were coherent with internationally recognized standards and classifications (INSARAG and FMT), not all teams deployed complied with these requirements. This had an impact on coordination and stand-down instruction received by the requesting institutions. Due to the number of rescuers and lack of SAR tasks some PS had to reconfigure their teams in Nepal.

A FMT coordination cell was established for emergency medical teams. The emergency medical teams were requested to register in the WHO system.

Some PS teams had logistical and tasking problems. PS have expressed a desire that UCPM Team arrives prior to other deploying elements, in order to facilitate the incoming assistance (customs, logistics, tasking, handover).

Challenges

- Logistic constraints and difficulties in obtaining landing permits slowed down the response of the European teams.
- INSARAG classification was required for all incoming SAR teams. Within the EU, many but not all MS have INSARAG-classification, which is a resource-intensive process.
- A number of organisations and FMTs were operating bilaterally which created a level of complexity in coordination.
- **Decisions on delivering assistance should be based on actual needs on the ground.** An over deployment of SAR teams occurred in the first phase of the response mission. This posed the question of how to scale down an over-deployment and how to bridge disaster management with humanitarian coordination.
- There was a high rotation of staff in Nepal which resulted in a loss of continuity. Critical continuity posts should be identified and individuals in these roles maintained for extended durations.

- The UCPM had participated in 2012 in a mission in Nepal, led by the European External Action Service, in view of a possible earthquake. It was not clear if the recommendations were taken into consideration during the response.
- Due to the fact that many EU citizens were residing in Nepal at the time of the earthquake, consular support was required. This was the primary responsibility of the EU delegation and the MS embassies, which was understaffed. The need to support those embassies and their employees with, partly psychological support, was also present.

Lessons Identified

- SAR is extremely time-critical and its appropriateness depends entirely on the speed with which it can be deployed. European teams should seek INSARAG classification if this is not already the case.
- The EU need to further align response capacities to WHO standards to be able to fully integrate in medical teams during international response operations.
- In large international operations, it is beneficial to seek EU presence in all relevant structures in the field, e.g. RSC, OSOCC etc..
- Copernicus activation added value with satellite mapping responding to an obvious need of maps on the ground.
- Having UCPM team members trained in WFP logistics proved extremely useful and should be encouraged in future missions.
- Deployment of structural assessment experts is more efficient when done in pairs/teams.
- The deployed UCPM Team staff was excellent in adapting to fast moving situations and in exchanging information. However, the UCPM team should be made self-sufficient in order to allow independent working from the point of arrival. In large response missions, deployment of a TAST is indispensable.
- The team mandate was broad and this allowed the flexibility to adapt to the situation on the ground.
- Daily situation reports were filed. This ensured that relevant information in the correct format reached both UNDAC and the ERCC.
- The parallel requests for assistance on the one hand from UN OCHA and on the other hand by the government of Nepal, under the UCPM, raised a number of procedural questions that need further consideration.

Recommendations

- **Decisions on deployment of USAR teams** should be based on a **selective approach**, taking into account the local capacity, logistical limitations of the receiving airport, the distance, speed of deployment, likelihood of success, availability of teams in the immediate neighbourhood, etc.
- Discussion is needed with OCHA and WHO on the scaling of FMTs: further sub-categories should be made, providing for more flexibility in the system.
- **The UCPM can support UNDAC in its coordination role, not only providing associated experts or filling gaps but with a more active operational coordination role within the OSOCC.** Cooperation with UN on the ground needs to be formalised in a guiding document.
- While the cooperation between the UCPM and UNDAC in the second part of the mission has been positive, it would have been preferable to pre-define Terms of Reference for a joint deployment. Moreover cooperation on the ground with UNDAC should not compromise the primary role of EUCP experts to facilitate the delivery of European assistance.
- Having an ERCC LO on the ground in advance of the team proved to be highly beneficial for the mission by preparing the ground and establishing contacts with the EU Delegation and other relevant stakeholders,
- Every deployment of a EUCP team requires a TAST. It is recommended to send the TAST simultaneously with the deployed team. In the case of Nepal, it was very beneficial having an emergency response expert already in place at the Danish Embassy.
- Frequent staff rotation in the EUCP Team should be avoided.
- Explore with the EEAS and United Nations possible facilitation role for permits, visa and other entry requirements.
- Clarify the procedural aspects of situations resulting in parallel requests for assistance from national and international actors.