

## **Summary for the 8<sup>th</sup> Americas' Defense Ministers Conference**

### **“Armed and Security Forces' Relief Support in Case of Natural Disasters”**

#### Introduction

Due to their destructive consequences, natural disasters and their impact on civil population, in the last decades, have been a central topic in diverse international forums.

Of special attention is the world conference about reduction of disasters held in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan, in January 2005, to develop the international strategy for disaster reduction within the next ten years.

The Heads of State meeting there committed themselves to considerably reduce the losses caused by disasters, regarding human lives, as well as social, economic and environment assets.

The government of Mexico considers the framework of Hyogo 2005-2015 as a vital tool to advance in the common effort to reduce the damage caused by disasters, and to get adapted to climatic change, as well as to attend to the State's mission of providing security and integrity for its inhabitants. It has developed a disaster response structure denominated “National Civil Protection System”, which coordinates the efforts of the agencies involved, through four ways of participation that are as follows: Executive Coordination, Technical Coordination, Technical Support and Co-responsibility. Based on them, all members of the system assume obligations of supportive collaboration.

This system and different programs integrating it contain a large number of interactions, generating a real necessity for coordination among participating agencies and bodies. For the above mentioned, there is an organization and operation manual ruling the specific participation roles required, assuring that such participation is timely, joint and proper.

In addition, the structure of the system is based on general coordination office, which is the top coordination and execution body of the Federal Government. A civil official is in charge and responsible for pooling the efforts of bodies of government, public and private bodies, volunteer groups and Armed Forces, among others.

### **The Armed Forces in Civil Population Relief**

Under this context and within the legal framework of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, its organic laws and General Civil Protection Law, the National Defense Secretariat and Navy Secretariat of Mexico are integrated into the above mentioned system, participating as technical coordinators or as co-responsible for the execution of the civil protection actions that are to be performed in all phases of disaster attention. This is done through the application of the Plan DN-III-E of the National Defense Secretariat and the *Plan Marina* of the Navy Secretariat.

In the role of technical coordinator, the Mexican National Defense Secretariat and the Navy Secretariat are responsible for advising and technically supporting with specialists and material resources, and coordinating and integrating the planning, operation and evaluation of the tasks to be developed.

In the role of co-responsible, the Armed Forces provide and support their programs, emergency plans, human and material resources available, for those civilian authorities performing in the Civil Protection System.

Even though participation of the Armed Forces is performed during the phases of prevention, relief and recovery, such participation is convincingly manifested in the phase of relief, through the execution of the following basic functions: warning, liaison among authorities, transportation and preventive evacuation, administration and provision of temporary shelters, damage assessment, security, search, salvage, rubble removal, basic restoration of strategic services, health care and supplies.

The above mentioned activities allow us to collaborate and materialize the participation of the Armed Forces with civil authorities, having as a result the timely population relief, becoming in this way into the main strength of the National Civil Protection System.

The relief plans established by the Armed Forces are military operational tools that enable an immediate and timely approach of the forces with the population. They are closely linked to civilian relief plans; this allows teams to operate in an integral manner. These plans are permanently updated for their application according to the lessons learned.

The use of the military element in these situations turns into one of the key resources because of its almost immediate availability any place in the country, derived from the military deployment throughout the national territory. In addition, there is a hierarchical organization, specialized training, and physical capacity to perform actions related to attention to disasters.

Experience acquired through multiple occasions the Armed Forces have participated in attention to disasters, has been compiled in diverse procedural manuals and specific plans ruling this participation and constituting the instrument through which a more effective and efficient attention has been consolidated in benefit of our population.

## **Lessons Learned**

Once we have referred to the structure that coordinates the attention at a national level and how the Armed Forces integrate such structure, let me give you a brief description of the most recent event when the National Civil Protection System was applied.

In October 2007, due to severe rains on the southern part of the country, there were significant floods in the state of Tabasco, which caused damages in 70% of the state, and affected more than one million four hundred and fifty thousand people.

The Armed Forces, in coordination with the Civil Protection System, performed the following prevention and relief actions:

During the Preventive Phase:

- Updating of risk mapping.
- Performance of drills to verify the organization of working teams and condition of the material available to attend an emergency situation.

- Checking the physical condition of those facilities assigned as collection centers, shelters and temporary refuges.
- Reconnaissance to verify the condition of the roads considered as main and alternative evacuation routes.
- Integration of a liaison officer into the state civil protection system.
- Updating of the telephone book of those bodies integrating the civil protection system.

#### During the Relief Phase:

- Warning activities were performed to alert the population about the increase on the level of water of dams and rivers crossing the state of Tabasco.
- In less than 24 hours, over 6,000 troops were mobilized, and within 48 hours, this strength was doubled, to reinforce the relief activities carried out by local troops.
- Preventive evacuation of 28,704 people, using ground, amphibious and air transportation means available in the Armed Forces.
- Preparation and distribution of 78,780 hot rations on a daily basis, in 7 communitarian kitchens and 50 field kitchens, providing a total of 2,019,390 rations.
- Establishment of 33 shelters managed by Armed Forces personnel, housing a total of 26,260 people.
- A logistic plan was materialized to guarantee the provision of food, water and medications, through the activation of four collection centers, where 1,370 metric tons of supplies were received, classified, controlled and distributed. In addition, 5,712,000 liters of water were purified. Also, through the establishment of an airlift 2,070 metric tons of supplies, clothes and water were transported.

- An interagency health plan was executed, firstly by the health cells of the disaster relief task force and naval health groups, providing medical consultations, distribution of medications and public health campaigns, which allow the population to be free from epidemics.
- A joint security plan was implemented through the deployment of military police and dog-and-handler teams, in coordination with local and federal forces of public security, who performed land and amphibious patrols to provide the population with certainty and confidence. This allowed them to increasingly perform their daily activities.
- 188,344 sand sacks were filled, which were placed along the banks of rivers crossing the city of Villahermosa, in order to contain the increase of the water level.
- Heavy machinery of military engineers removed 108,821 cubic meters of rubble, mud and furniture damaged by the flood.
- Three military movable metallic bridges were deployed to facilitate the transit of people and vehicles on isolated communities.
- As an innovation, at the shelters managed by military personnel, reading rooms were implemented where military performed as tellers and reading facilitators.

The attention to the above mentioned emergency provided us with an experience that allowed to adequate and update the plans to timely respond in the face of a similar event.

## **Humanitarian Aid**

Now, let me tell you about the way the Armed Forces participate in humanitarian aid, to relief civilian people of friendly countries affected by a disaster.

This humanitarian aid is provided under the following procedure: when the government of a friendly country, affected by a disaster, requests relief before the international community or, when the President of Mexico, once he learns that a disaster has occurred, and as a solidarity gesture, offers support to the affected nation.

Once this offering has been accepted, an interagency delegation is integrated with working teams of the diverse agencies integrating the structure of the National Civil Protection System, joined by military teams that have experience in managing disaster zones, medical care, search and rescue, among others. They take with them certain basic medical items and supplies to immediately attend the victims.

Sometimes, a working team travels previously to the affected country and, along with officials of the Mexican diplomatic mission and the supported local government, assesses the situation and determines the kind and amount of help required to mitigate the damages caused on population.

Procedures and techniques applied by the working teams of the humanitarian aid delegation are the same as those applied in the execution of relief plans within the Mexican territory.

The military component participates with the support teams, wearing military uniforms and the insignias distinctive of the Mexican Armed Forces, they travel unarmed and wear a badge that identifies them as members of the delegation.

In the field work, working teams perform in coordination with the operational command and in accordance with the relief plan of the supported nation, are deployed on assigned areas, and work under a scheme of permanent liaison and coordination with local civil or military authorities.

Experience in attention to disasters has made clear that immediate use of Armed Forces in support of civilian authorities translates into a proper and timely attention to population, collaborating in a quick recovery of the affected areas.

The Armed Forces, when accomplishing their mission of population relief, provide the society with certainty and tranquility, overcoming difficult situations in an environment of peace and order, necessary to perform the actions that enable the State to affirm its position in the global order.

We can conclude that the use of armed forces in activities of population relief in case of a disaster, integrated into a civil protection system, allows us to act in a coordinated and joint manner to promptly relief the affected population in natural disasters, becoming into a guarantee of timely, efficient, effective, and congruent performance, as a result of organization and discipline which are the characteristics of such forces, during their daily performance of military activities.

Thank you very much  
For your attention