

*In the name of god, Most gracious, Most merciful*

**Qatari Search and Rescue Team's Experience during the  
Relief Operations in the Sumatra Island's Earthquake  
(30 September-15 October 2009)**

Worksheet presented at the Doha International Conference on the "HOPEFOR"  
initiative: improving the effectiveness and coordination of military and civil defence  
assets for natural disaster response

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Doha – Qatar  
November 2011



# Introduction

## Worksheet's goals

This paper aims to:

- ▷ Stress the importance of an effective use of the military assets in the process of responding to crises and disasters through the experience of the Qatari Search and Rescue Team of the Internal Security Force (Lekhwiya) during the Sumatra earthquake.
- ▷ Highlight the pros and cons of the experience gained by the Team, then broaden the discussion in order to find solutions and ways to use the military assets in rescue operations.

## The third century's challenges

As the world enters the second decade of the third millennium, a number of challenges are joining forces and threatening to make the times we live in look like the era of crises and disasters.

## Qatari Search and Rescue Team's Background

Before presenting the aforementioned experience, here's a brief overview of the Qatari Search and Rescue Team and its achievements

- ▷ The goal behind setting up the Team  
To undertake major and vital search and rescue missions, inside the State of Qatar and abroad.



- ▷ Tasks and Mandate  
Air, sea and land rescue operations.
  
- ▷ Foreign Participations  
The Team was involved in several disasters and crisis, totalizing 23 participations since its creation in 2004.

## The Qatari Search and Rescue Team's Experience gained during Sumatra's earthquake (Republic of Indonesia)

The experience earned by the Qatari Search and Rescue Team through its involvement in many crises and disasters allows us to present a case where the military assets were used in the process of responding to crises and disasters: the Indonesian earthquake.

The Team joined the search and rescue operations as the Sumatra island in Indonesia was struck on Wednesday September 9<sup>th</sup> 2009 by an earthquake of Richter magnitude 7.6, killing 1 100 and wounding 2 400.

With the help of the UN On-Site Operations Coordination Centre (OSOCC), the Team managed to identify the areas not yet reached by rescuers from other countries, then started planning its future missions. Certain guidelines provided by the OSOCC were utilized in this mission.

The Indonesian Armed Forces helped reaching hard to access areas

In the absence of a prior mechanism or coordination for an effective use of military assets, the following difficulties aroused:

- ▷ Poor preparation and equipment.
- ▷ Lack of a database.
- ▷ Absence of a mechanism for a prior military coordination that could provide clear directions, behaviors and decisions regarding the disaster, which led to poor preparation and equipment.
- ▷ Non-optimal exploitation of the military assets.



Bearing in mind that the team possessed advanced equipment and military assets, such as the (Prompter) that was not used for lack of information, forcing men and search dogs to walk long distances, wasting precious time and efforts that could be better used on search and rescue tasks.



## Lessons drawn from experience

Lessons learned can be summarized as follows:

### Advantages

- ▷ Time saving  
The military coordination during the operations allowed a faster response to the disaster.
- ▷ Efforts saving  
The military assets that were used spared the Team's energy.
- ▷ Security and protection  
The Team's security and protection were assured in collaboration with the Indonesian Armed Forces.
- ▷ Overcoming difficulties  
The Indonesian army smoothed all obstacles met by the Team.
- ▷ Experience  
This mission increased the practical expertise of the Team.

### Shortcomings

- ▷ Lack of coordination  
No pre-planned coordination in dealing with the disaster led to unnecessary loss of time and energy.
- ▷ Absence of a database  
Lack of information and database providing ways of dealing with a given situation



- ▷ Weakness of media channels  
Poor media communication and absence of direct contacts between the bodies intervening in the disaster.
  
- ▷ Lack of an institutional system.  
Absence of a permanent institutional body to coordinate and manage the search and rescue operations.



## Recommendations

Based on the lessons learned, merits and drawbacks stated above, we propose the following suggestions and recommendations:

- ▷ An enhanced and effective military coordination and the use of military assets in response to crises and disasters.
- ▷ The creation of a mechanism in the form of an institutional body that would coordinate and manage rescue operations at every stage.
- ▷ The creation of a database to meet the urgent need for relevant data and information that could help dealing with crises and disasters.
- ▷ The Strengthening and the effective use of direct communication channels and all media means, according to a prior set reference.

