



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### USSOUTHCOM Medical Response Exercise

Belmopan, Belize

16-19 May 2011

The United States Southern Command (USSOUTHCOM) hosted a Medical Response Exercise May 16-19, 2011 in Belmopan, Belize with support from the Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center (AFHSC) and the Center for Disaster and Humanitarian Assistance Medicine (CDHAM). This 4-day command post emergency operation center drill aimed to develop Belizean response capability in the setting of infectious disease outbreaks and sought to improve foreign civilian interaction, regional cooperation, and disaster relief capabilities in the region.

The command post exercise was a result of a July 2010 workshop hosted in Belize by USSOUTHCOM, AFHSC, CDHAM and the Defense Institute for Medical Operations focusing on Disaster Planning and Pandemic Influenza. Whereas the July 2010 workshop provided basic understanding of planning processes and strategies for a national emergency medical system in a classroom-based setting, this command post drill tested the Belizean national emergency response plan in the setting of a national disaster.

The objectives for the Medical Response Exercise included:

- Introducing new technology, tactics, techniques, and procedures to increase internal capabilities for better disaster preparedness and fast response;
- Improving joint integrated humanitarian assistance/disaster response capabilities and increasing capacity building during the preparedness stages of disaster response;
- Cultivating an improved situational awareness among Belizean stakeholders and the international community to ensure security and sustainable stability within the country and in the region during a catastrophic event.

Key participants included representatives from the Belize Ministry of Health, Ministry of Defense, National Emergency Management Organization, National Emergency Operation Center, and the Belize National Emergency Management Agency. Additional representation from US Government and intergovernmental organizations included: Department of State, Department of Defense, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Agency for International Development, Pan-American Health Organization, Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency and the International Red Cross.

The exercise scenario involved a hurricane with regional flooding compounded by a concomitant cholera outbreak and leveraged an interactive computer simulation model replicating resources and organizations during a national epidemic. Belizean Emergency Operation stakeholders monitored the scenario execution and briefed their daily observations and lessons learned to their colleagues. The last day featured stakeholders briefing their senior officials from the Belizean ministries of health, agriculture, transportation and emergency operations.

Belize has the capability for detecting, monitoring and reporting infectious disease outbreaks with an elegant GPS-facilitated mapping mechanism, and was able to identify those processes that were successful or requiring further improvement. Their capacity to respond to an infectious disease outbreak of national/international significance greatly fosters regional security in the USSOUTHCOM area of responsibility.