



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

USCENTCOM Infectious Disease and Disaster Response Conference
Abu Dhabi, UAE
11-14 July 2011

From July 11-14, 2011, the Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center (AFHSC), collaborating with the Center for Disaster and Humanitarian Assistance Medicine (CDHAM), and the US Central Command (USCENTCOM) held the ***Infectious Diseases and Disaster Response Conference***, hosted by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Armed Forces in Abu Dhabi. This conference promoted regional interoperability and enhanced the capability of regional countries to respond to complex humanitarian and health emergencies, with a particular focus on response to infectious disease-related disasters such as pandemics.

Specific objectives of the conference included:

- a) Creating a platform for military leaders and civil authorities to share best practices and lessons learned in regards to emerging infectious diseases and disaster response;
- b) Providing regional partners with current updates on global emerging infectious threats and surveillance improvement;
- c) Assisting regional partners in understand the roles of the international community (international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and regional governments) in the management of disasters; and
- d) Identifying national and regional opportunities for improvement of surveillance and regional coordination that will assist in the development of a regional response to emerging infectious hazards and disasters.

The conference included a total of approximately 95 distinguished participants and lecturers from the United Arab Emirates, the United States, Iraq, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Lebanon, Qatar, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and Yemen. Individuals from each of the countries were invited to present on best practices in disaster mitigation within their countries. Subject matter experts from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, AFHSC, Georgetown University, the George Washington University, and the Carolinas Medical Center presented on topics relevant to infectious disease and disaster response. The conference incorporated facilitated discussions on the SPHERE project, strategic communication in disaster response, and the World Health Organization's International Health Regulations (2005). Attendees had the opportunity to participate in a regional pandemic response tabletop exercise, which identified gaps and promoted regional communication.

As a result of the workshop, participants were able to identify existing gaps in their current national and regional plans and methodologies, examine previous infectious disease outbreaks for lessons learned, consider possible ways to address some of the identified gaps, and build relationships with their regional counterparts. Future interactions will fortify regional partnerships and cooperative agreements to strengthen infectious disease and disaster response within the region.