
April 2007 Defense Security Cooperation Agency Humanitarian Assistance Conference

**By
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More than 100 experts gathered in Washington for the 2007 Defense Security Cooperation Agency's (DSCA) Humanitarian Assistance (HA) Conference. The event drew representatives from across the spectrum, covering everything from budget, policy and training to inter-agency coordination and technology.

Lieutenant General Jeff Kohler, [then] DSCA director, opened the event by applauding the collaborative efforts of the humanitarian assistance community by stating the following:

I want to express my thanks and admiration for your significant contributions to our government's vision of shaping the military environment, seeking to avert humanitarian crises, promoting democratic development, enabling countries to recover from conflict, and, at the same time, giving relief to people and communities in need. These programs support regional cooperation strategies by providing access to selected countries and fostering goodwill for our military forces and our government.

DSCA assumed responsibility for program management, implementation execution responsibility for the Overseas Humanitarian, Disaster, and Civic Aid (OHDACA) appropriation about nine years ago.

Over the last few years the humanitarian assistance community has been extremely busy. Most of OHDACA's appropriation over the last two years was used to support both the 2004 tsunami disaster relief mission in the Indian Ocean and the people of Pakistan's 2005 earthquake recovery efforts. Attendees heard from all of the supporting elements for DoD HA programs, including the Office of Management and Budget, Department of State, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), various policy offices from the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), the Joint Staff, DSCA's Humanitarian De-mining Training Center representatives, and the Special Operations Command. While the briefings and views reflected a depth of experience and expertise, this conference was also about feedback.

"The DoD HA program is a DoD tool for supporting national security," said Diane Halvorsen, director of humanitarian assistance and mine action, DSCA. "Our goal for this conference was to rationalize the different methodologies employed by each Geographic Combatant Command (GCC) to carry out its HA activities, share lessons learned, and provide the guidance needed for implementing these programs as efficiently and effectively as possible across all commands," she said. DSCA's humanitarian assistance staff consists of thirteen people. Each individual is strategically connected to the web of humanitarian professionals across the globe. "We have a group of program managers who constantly communicate throughout the humanitarian assistance community," Halvorsen added. "Events like these are designed to improve upon that level of communication."

Like chain-linked fence, Halvorsen's team serves as the connectors between the war fighters, the supplies or suppliers, U.S. federal agencies and the rest of the world. Unique DoD guidance supports a level of humanitarian engagement that paints a smile on a hungry child's face, rebuilds a community stricken by natural disaster or offers medicine to those attacked by crippling diseases. "This event gave us an opportunity to bring representatives from the combatant commands together to explore the different ways humanitarian assistance operations are managed in the field," Halvorsen explained.

“These gatherings help DSCA develop and cement relationships that will certainly improve future humanitarian business practices.”