



SOUTH ASIA
REGIONAL
ENVIRONMENTAL
SECURITY FORUM

PRESS RELEASE



Co-Sponsored by: | Maldives National Defence Force and
the U.S. Pacific Command

Maldives Teams with USPACOM to Shift Environmental Security into Action

Male', Maldives, 05 June 2014 –Today is World Environment Day. Here in the Maldives, over 1,190 islands dot across 800-km of the Indian Ocean. The tranquility and emerald waters are ubiquitous as you move from one island to the next. However, the impacts of climate change and resource competition are starting to show in this small island nation. With a sense of urgency, the Republic of Maldives is not waiting to see what happens.

The Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF) is moving proactively to combat these problems. Reaching out to civilian ministries and South Asia nations, they partnered with the U.S. Pacific Command to execute the South Asia Regional Environmental Security Forum (RESF) from 2-5 June 5, 2014. The Forum featured over 80 participants from 10 countries, who gathered to identify civil-military solutions for water security, waste management, resource protection and energy challenges in South Asia.

In his opening ceremony statement, the Maldives Minister of Defence Mohamed Nazim set the stage for RESF discussions, "It has to be a collective effort to share knowledge and expertise, and meet on a common platform of mutual benefit to formulate the required policies and strategies related to the environment. Regional forums such as these are the way forward on this and other issues."

With his marching orders in hand, the RESF focused on how to operationalize water, waste, energy and resource protection security in the region. Presentations were delivered from subject matter experts across the region and various sectors, including military, civilian government, private companies, and non-governmental institutions. The Forum also included group activities to bring action to environmental security themes. This included an Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) work session, a site visit to Thulusdhoo Island, and a Table-Top Exercise addressing a hazardous cargo ship grounding on a local reef. The Thulusdhoo Island visit was a particularly effective demonstration, exposing waste management, erosion and energy challenges, and the toll they inflict on people throughout the region.

"This is the nexus for USPACOM and our partner nations," said Brig Gen Mark McLeod, J4. "HA/DR is one of our primary missions in this theater, and increasing our partner resiliency against the effects of climate change was our prime directive for RESF."

Throughout the event, participants capitalized on the opportunity to identify where environmental security measures could be brought to action in South Asia. During the After-Action Review, each country identified at least two areas where change and action could occur. Opportunities included regional oil spill response, integrated water resource management, disaster management, and common waste management reduction strategies.

These initiatives will not only form the basis for bi-lateral and multi-lateral solutions to capability gaps like water distribution and production and firefighting, they have set the stage for even more action in the future. “We’ve turned a community of interest in environmental security, to a community of action,” said McLeod.

In his event closing comments, the Honorable Thoriq Ibrahim, Maldives Minister of Environment & Energy, reaffirmed the value of the week’s activities. “Local environmental issues require regional and global solutions. We are taking a bold step forward and appreciate Pacific Command and our regional partner contributions to our collective future.” U.S. Ambassador to Sri Lanka and the Maldives, Ms. Michele Sison, also lauded the work done this week. “A 1000% success!”

Next year’s Pacific Environmental Security Forum, which is the fourth consecutive international environmental security event sponsored by USPACOM, will look to expand further. The event will be hosted in Bangkok, and will be Pan-Pacific and include a diverse group of participants capable of continuing to bring action to environmental security.

---CUT LINE---



Photo 01 (photo_01.jpg) – Dr. Michelle Haynes (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Institute for Water Resources) leads a work group session during the South Asia Regional Environmental Security Forum. (Credit: MNDF)



Photo 02 (photo_02.jpg) - Ms. Nicole Griffin (U.S. Marine Corps) explains waste management strategies on Thulusdhoo Island at the South Asia Regional Environmental Security Forum. (Credit: USACE)



Photo 03 (photo_03.jpg) - Representatives from the Maldives, Sri Lanka and Nepal discuss water security challenges during a panel session at the South Asia Regional Environmental Security Forum. (Credit: MNDF)



Photo 04 (photo_04.jpg) – Brigadier General Mark McLeod (U.S. Pacific Command) tours environmental sustainability practices with a group of school students from the Maldives at the South Asia Regional Environmental Security Forum.