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UNHRD BASE AT BRINDISI: EXCELLENCE IN SIMULATIONS OF HUMANITARIAN DISASTERS. STUDENTS, VOLUNTEERS AND LOCAL MILITARY ALSO INVOLVED

BRINDISI. An emergency simulation for World Food Programme (WFP) staff ended today at the United Nations Humanitarian Response Depot (UNHRD) at Brindisi. Those involved on this final day were the representatives of nine diplomatic missions to the United Nations organizations in Rome. During the preceding days the people involved included students from the Carnaro Technical Institute in Brindisi, volunteers from the Italian Regional Red Cross and military personnel from the Marina San Marco Brigade.

The simulation, which began on Sunday 11 November, involved 19 WFP staff members of various nationalities engaged in a series of exercises "in the field" in an imaginary country struck by flooding. To prepare for operations that are typical in the first 72 hours of a humanitarian emergency, the participants carried out inspections, estimated damage and needs and prepared a humanitarian intervention plan. To make the exercise more realistic, the simulation took place on the site of the disused USAF San Vito base, now managed by the Italian Air Force and used for its own training. "The facilities of our base, assigned to us by the Italian Government, together with those offered for the exercise by the Brindisi airport authorities, provide the perfect setting for the simulation of an emergency situation," explained Marta Laurienzo, Manager of the Brindisi UNHRD, recalling how over the years the UNHRD has for these reasons become a centre of excellence for the training of humanitarian workers and humanitarian response teams.

To reach the disaster area the participants had to undergo simulated controls and searches carried out by the San Marco Brigade as part of its own training. Once the checkpoint had been negotiated, the humanitarian workers met refugees and internally displaced people, who were played by students of the Naval Technical Institute (*Istituto Tecnico Nautico*) and Italian Red Cross volunteers, and collected data for the organization of humanitarian aid and logistics operations. The organizers of the simulation emphasized that "... by putting themselves in the shoes of people who have lost everything and desperately need help, the participants themselves learned the importance of rapid humanitarian intervention and what it means to be humanitarian workers ..." and thanked the students and volunteers for their involvement.

Once the intervention plan had been prepared, the humanitarian workers presented it to the representatives of the international community, represented by the diplomatic delegation of the Member States of the Executive Board of WFP. At the conclusion of the simulation, the delegates of Bangladesh, Belgium, Ecuador, France, Liberia, Ireland, New Zealand, Poland and the United States of America visited the base facilities.

"During these initiatives we always find a great deal of interest among the members of our Executive Board, who appreciate the efficiency of the UNHRD and its commitment to developing new logistics solutions and reducing the environmental impact of humanitarian operations," said Harriet Spanos, secretary to the WFP Executive Board. Another visitor was Jakob Kern, director of the WFP Supply and Distribution Division, which includes the Brindisi UNHRD and the other five members of the UNHRD network in Accra, Dubai, Kuala Lumpur, Las Palmas and Panama.

The UNHRD in Brindisi has been organizing and hosting humanitarian emergency simulations since 2007. Over the years several international organizations, of which the first was WFP, and non-governmental organizations such as ASVI and Intersos, have had exercises organized to prepare their staff for field missions. "From the very beginning local institutions, organizations and students have participated enthusiastically," recalled Laurienzo and, thanking them for their participation, noted that "... their support and collaboration are one of the keys to the success of our simulations and exemplify our historical links with this area."

"Participation in these activities and visits to our base offer the possibility of learning about the fundamental role that it plays in supporting humanitarian responses, delivering logistics equipment and helping to supply aid for the affected populations," concluded Laurienzo, renewing the invitation to pupils at local schools to visit UNHRD Brindisi.

Photograph of the visit: go to <https://bit.ly/2fQahB2>

Managed by WFP, and part of a network of six UNHRDs, the Brindisi UNHRD dispatches immediate humanitarian assistance anywhere in the world on behalf of the humanitarian community.

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