

The April Public Affairs Course for International Students had nine students representing eight countries: Bulgaria, Turkey, Kuwait, Moldova, Philippines, Ukraine, Macedonia and Taiwan. Photos by DINFOS.



# International Military Students at DINFOS

**BY RIVERS JOHNSON**

Chief, International Military Student Office, DINFOS

**T**HE DEFENSE INFORMATION SCHOOL at Fort Meade is known around the world for its excellence in public affairs training and visual information. The school has played a critical role in the education and training of U.S. military members and civilians since its doors opened more than 50 years ago. Those DINFOS-trained service members and civilians have gone on to help commanders and organizations tell their stories and highlight the unique missions of the U.S. military and its international partners.

DINFOS also supports U.S. security cooperation programs by training international students—both military and civilian—in a variety of public affairs courses. Since 1949, DINFOS has contributed to the security cooperation efforts by training more than 1,000 international students from more than 80 countries.

Security cooperation is simply those activities designed to "encourage and enable international partners to work with the United States to achieve strategic objectives. Security Cooperation is an important tool of national security and foreign policy," according to a Department of Defense (DoD) Directive 5132.03.

DINFOS trains approximately 30 international military students each year as part of the various security cooperation programs, which fall under the U.S. Department of State and is executed by the DoD through its respective service components. Like other security cooperation efforts, DINFOS' training of international students is designed to enhance interoperability and capabilities for joint

operations and establishes a rapport between the U.S. military and the respective country's military to build alliances for the future. The international military student office at DINFOS manages the day-to-day operations of the international military students.

"Our goal is to prepare our graduates to be more effective public affairs advisers and leaders in their respective countries," said U.S. Army Colonel Martin Downie, DINFOS commandant, who served as Chief Public Affairs Officer at SHAPE before his current assignment. "We want to ensure DINFOS is recognized as a world class public affairs training institution for our international partners," he added.

The majority of the international students attending DINFOS are trained in five key areas: communication skills, media relations, public affairs in international operations, public affairs planning and social media. Courses for international students average from two weeks to 24. Major Stefan Zemanovic, an Air Force officer from the Slovak Republic, was a recent honor graduate from the Public Affairs Qualification Course. Zemanovic said DINFOS provided him with realistic training he can apply in his home country. "I knew the value of DINFOS as many of my colleagues were graduates," said Zemanovic. "I considered the public affairs training mandatory for me if I was going to compete on an international scale."

International students attending DINFOS must have a good command of the English language. Some students spend several months at the Defense Language Institute in San Antonio, honing their English language

skills prior to coming to DINFOS. Many international officers who graduated from DINFOS return to their countries and become influential in their countries' military. One such case was retired Lieutenant General Sukumal Thanyasiri Weswongsatip of the Royal Thai Army. Weswongsatip, who graduated from the "Public Affairs Qualification Course" in 1993, was selected in 2006 to join Thailand's first cadre of female general officers.

"My early success as a military broadcaster and later managing or giving interviews as I went up the ranks is largely due to the great training I received at DINFOS," says Weswongsatip. Weswongsatip recently visited DINFOS to see how the school has grown since she was a student here.

DINFOS also offers a five-week course designed specifically for international students where the focus is more NATO and United Nations-centric. The Public Affairs Course for International Students provides basic public affairs training and is designed to support DoD's goal of building the public affairs capacity for its partner nations.

Security cooperation is key for mission success on the international playing field, and the Defense Information School is doing its part to build, foster and maintain those key international relationships so critical to operating in the current global environment.

International officers who want to attend public affairs training at the Defense Information School should use their Ministry of Defense channels. U.S. military organizations can use their training program managers. ✦