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4 "These trends affect us all – business, emergency planners, responders, governments, communities and individuals – and Jennifer Hesterman provides a sobering reminder of what happens when online crime, terrorist and vigilantism spill over into the real world (p64). This is backed up by the heightened vulnerabilities highlighted by authors in our cyber feature (p40). CRJ is not for tearing down systems that work, nor does it advocate the indiscriminate rip-up of assumptions. But failure to ask questions and debate the more difficult subjects that have been skirted around for many years, can only lead to crippling atrophy."
The International Search and Rescue Advisory Group has reviewed its guidelines for dealing with the sudden onset of events involving large scale structural collapses. Here, Anwar Abdullah outlines the group’s strategy.

Established in 1998, the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (Insarag) supports capacity-building at all levels. It develops and promotes globally accepted standards for urban search and rescue (USAR) assistance, co-ordination methodologies and tools, as well as mobilisation and information exchange protocols among relevant stakeholders. The network also encourages co-operation and experience-sharing between members and partners.

The Insarag Guidelines were endorsed by the UN General Assembly Resolution 57/150 (December 2002) on ‘Strengthening the Effectiveness and Co-ordination of International USAR Assistance’ and provide a systematised methodology to deal with the sudden onset of disasters that involve large scale structural collapses.

The methodology provides a process for preparedness, co-operation, and co-ordination of all humanitarian assistance providers. Its development was based on the collective experiences of its member states and organisations that have existing national USAR capability.

Main reference material

As a working document, it is constantly reviewed with input from lessons learnt in major national and international USAR operations, exercises and certification processes. The guiding principle is that this should be the main reference material, effectively serving the needs of users. The Guidelines have been restructured from a single volume to three volumes, which allows specific users to access the necessary information more easily.

Volume I provides an overview of the Insarag network, giving policymakers an understanding of the role, responsibility and obligation of their organisation in supporting and rendering humanitarian assistance. It also spells out the linkages with other parts of the UN establishments and partner organisations and provides information that will determine a state’s decision to be part of this set-up and commit the necessary efforts and resources to support it.

Volume II explains the different Insarag systems and methodologies. It comprises three manuals:

- Manual A maps out an overall framework to help a state develop a national capacity and mechanism in USAR as part of its national emergency response framework. The manual defines the process of identifying and supporting existing USAR resources or developing new capacity through the creation of systems and processes. Capacity development could begin from the first contact of a responder, to developing an Insarag recognised USAR team – from light to medium and heavy teams – and eventually achieving certification by Insarag.
- Manual B describes the roles and responsibilities of the key stakeholders during USAR operations, such as the UN, affected and assisting countries as well as international USAR teams. It spells out the five components of USAR capability – management, search, rescue, medical and logistics – within the USAR response cycle; and
- Manual C defines the minimum operational standards for international teams operating within the Insarag network. Teams preparing to undergo an Insarag External Classification/Reclassification (IEC/R) must have a deep understanding of the expected planning, preparation and delivery requirements. By following these standards, teams will be prepared to offer professional services, operate in a collaborative manner and provide timely, lifesaving assistance to an affected population.

Volume III is a field operational guide for all USAR managers and team members. Developed as a quick-reference guide with field and tactical information for all missions, exercises and training sessions, it comprises the five USAR capability components mentioned above and includes a section on safety and security.

After a comprehensive two-year review, several amendments and additions have been made to the Guidelines. Key inclusions in the new Guidelines 2020 are:

- National Accreditation Process (NAP) and Insarag Recognised National Accreditation Process (Insarag – one of the critical aspects in developing the national capacity is the establishment of a NAP for the teams. This allows a state to manage, monitor and establish national standards. The NAP of a member state can then be recognised by the Insarag General Assembly resolution 57/150. This is an offer of assistance to an affected state.
- Classifit Light USAR teams – Insarag will now classify this team, which must possess all five key USAR components and have the ability to conduct search and rescue operations in collapsed or failed structures. It must be capable of conducting USAR operations to ASR Level I and is expected to have the operational capability to work only at one work site for one work period, being 12 hours per day for five days.

- Pre-greening for an EIR – one of the key differences between the IEC and EIR process is pre-greening, where the team leader EIR/CR classifier, the USAR team and the mentor discuss and agree on the elements of the relevant checklist to be demonstrated, presented or explained prior to the IEC/R exercise. This is one of the key responsibilities of a team’s mentor.
- Beyond the ruble – this is an offer of assistance by the USAR teams to the affected community during the transitional phase between the USAR and the early recovery/relief phase.
- Guidance notes and technical reference library – these serve as two live knowledge management platforms on Insarag’s website. All Insarag-endorsed documents are placed under the guidance notes, while the technical reference library is a knowledge repository for best practices.
- Guidelines review process – a regular five-year review cycle led by the Insarag guidelines review group. It should reflect an evolution in practice, embrace new technology and development and act as a lean and easy reference material for policy and decision-makers as well as USAR teams; and
- Receiving mechanism – as part of national capacity building and strengthening, it is important for countries to develop a receiving mechanism that facilitates decision-making in identifying, requesting and accepting international assistance in a timely manner. This will augment the state’s disaster management capacity by analysing national risks and identifying possible gaps. In developing a national receiving mechanism, it is useful for countries to take reference from UN General Assembly resolution 57/150 that states: “The affected State has the primary role in the initiation, organisation, co-ordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance within its territory.”

Insarag guidelines – fit for purpose

It is hoped that the new Guidelines will bring the Insarag standards and capabilities to new heights and further enhance preparedness and readiness in member states.

The revision will facilitate better, seamless co-ordination and response, allowing teams to render immediate and effective assistance to the affected countries. Even as the Guidelines are to be implemented in 2021, concurrent work streams are already in place to prepare for the future.

A transitional guidelines review group has been formed to undertake the implementation of the new Guidelines and engage communities and partners for inputs and feedback. The team will also work with stakeholders to identify new areas for consideration and inclusion in the next review.

In addition, discussions are already happening about reinforcing quality standards, advancing flexibility and diversity, enhancing preparedness efforts and fostering partnerships and augmenting international assistance arrangements, as well as implementing new technologies and information management.

The new features, along with other community-led initiatives, will help to shape future Guidelines to ensure they always remain fit for purpose.

More information can be found at www.insarag.org