



Armenia became a member of the UN INSARAG

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On September 4, Armenia became a member of the UN International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) after the Armenian Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Team successfully underwent a three-day external classification exercise held on 1-4 September and was classified as a Medium USAR Team.

The closing event, hosted by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations (MTAES) on 4 September, the day of civil protection and rescuer, summarized the results of the last qualification phase of the examination. The event was attended by the representatives from the INSARAG Secretariat, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and a team of peer experts, including from classifying (Netherlands, Belarus, UK, Germany, Switzerland, Spain), observer (Russian Federation, South Africa) and mentor countries (Poland).

Since officially requesting to join INSARAG in 2012, the Armenian USAR Team has undergone an INSARAG External Classification Exercise, in line with the criteria established in the INSARAG Guidelines. Throughout this process, the MTAES efforts were strongly supported by the UNDP Armenia Office through close cooperation with the INSARAG Secretariat and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.



On behalf of the Ministry, Mr. Haykaram Mkhitarian, Deputy Minister of Territorial Administration and Emergency Situations, expressed his gratitude to the guests for their support to the Armenian USAR Team and observation of the qualification process. Mr. Mkhitarian noted that the success of the team is the result of several years and hard work, highlighting the valuable contribution of partners, particularly from Switzerland and Poland.

Mr. Jesper Lund, the Secretary of INSARAG, noted: "It was the 1988 Armenian Spitak earthquake that highlighted the need for civil protection groups to have stronger preparedness and response capabilities in order to better coordinate and save more lives," explained Mr. Lund. "The urban search and rescue teams that deployed to Armenia in 1988 took the initiative to begin the conversation that led to INSARAG - International Search and Rescue Advisory Group."

The INSARAG is a network of over 80 disaster-prone and disaster-responding countries and organizations dedicated to urban search and rescue and operational field coordination. Their vision is to save lives by promoting efficiency, enhanced quality, and coordination amongst national and international USAR teams. To achieve this, INSARAG has developed a voluntary, independent peer review process of international USAR teams.

"A 36-hour realistic urban disaster scenario exercise, with the support of international peer experts as well as mentors from Poland made the INSARAG External Classification of the Armenian USAR team possible and a success," said Lund. "INSARAG has now successfully classified 43 teams from 40 countries - a value added resource to any country requesting for international assistance following major disasters."

Mr. Christoph Bierwirth, UN Resident Coordinator a.i. in Armenia, congratulated the MTAES on successfully passing the qualification and becoming INSARAG member. He emphasized the importance of this event for the UN Armenia Office, which, during large disasters will serve as a coordination body for managing the humanitarian efforts amongst the international community, including search and rescue.

