



**INSARAG IN THE AMERICAS
XI MEETING OF THE REGIONAL GROUP
31 October – 1 November 2012
San José, Costa Rica**

Chairman summary

The meeting of the INSARAG Regional Group of the Americas was held on 31 October and 1 November 2012 in San Jose, Costa Rica. It was hosted by the Government of Costa Rica in its capacity as Co-chair of the Regional Group and organized jointly between the Co-Chairs, Costa Rica and Mexico, the Vice-chairs, Guatemala and Peru, as well as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), in its capacity as INSARAG Secretariat.

The meeting was opened by Ms. Vanessa Rosales Ardón, President of the National Commission for Risk Prevention and Emergency Response (CNE) of Costa Rica. Likewise, Ambassador Toni Frisch, Global Chairman of INSARAG and Ms. Yoriko Yasukawa, UN Resident Coordinator in Costa Rica each gave a keynote address.

The meeting gathered a total of 46 participants from 16 countries of the region, all represented by their INSARAG focal points or in representation of their political focal point and one regional organization (CEPREDENAC), in addition to IFRC, UNDP Costa Rica, and OCHA, as well as Switzerland (SDC) as observer.

The following topics were discussed in the meeting:

1. INSARAG in the Americas - activities and priorities of 2012
2. INSARAG activities at the global level and in the other regions, as well as action points of the 2012 INSARAG Steering Group
3. Urban risk
4. Procedures for certification / accreditation of national USAR teams
5. Update on the IEC (INSARAG External Classification), and presentation of the Re-classification certificates to the USAR teams from Los Angeles and Fairfax, USA.
6. Update on the INSARAG Working Groups
7. Capacity building of national USAR teams and the support that can be offered by international IEC classified teams
8. INSARAG Governance
9. Designation of the next Chair and Vice-Chairs for 2013
10. Planning of activities for the INSARAG Regional Group in 2013
11. Announcement of international events by countries

Below is the summary of the meeting. All the presentations and meeting documents are in the Virtual OSOCC (<http://vosocc.unocha.org>) and on the website created by Costa Rica (CNE), www.cne.go.cr/insarag.

1. INSARAG in the Americas - activities and priorities of 2012

The Co-Chairs of the INSARAG Regional Group of the Americas, Mr. Sigifredo Pérez (Costa Rica) and Ms. Ana Lucia Hill (Mexico), presented the report of activities of the INSARAG Regional Group in the Americas in 2012 focusing on the commitments of the Co- and Vice-chairs (the "regional leadership group").

- Participation and representation of the Regional Group in the annual meeting of the INSARAG Steering Group, in February 2012, Geneva, Switzerland
- Working meeting in person of the regional leadership group, in February 2012, Geneva, Switzerland
- Representation of the Regional Group in the V Regional Meeting on Enhancing International Humanitarian Partnerships (MIAH) in Panama, March 2012, and incorporation of INSARAG commitments in the Action Plan adopted at the meeting (http://www.redhum.org/archivos/pdf/ID_11327_BE_Plan_de_Accion_Final_V_MIAH_ESP.pdf/http://www.redhum.org/archivos/pdf/ID_11328_BE_Action_Plan_Final_V_MIAH_ENG.pdf)
- Participation and representation in the side event on INSARAG at the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations in New York, July 2012
- Dissemination and promotion of the work of INSARAG in other forums
- Bimonthly coordination teleconferences of the regional leadership group, the Secretariat/ OCHA Geneva and OCHA Regional Office (ROLAC)
- Translation of the IEC/IER Handbook to Spanish
- Review, printing and delivery of the INSARAG Guidelines in Spanish which had been translated by USA/OFDA/LAC. (A copy was handed over to each participant in the INSARAG regional exercise in Mexico and in the Regional Group meeting in Costa Rica. Moreover, the rest of guidelines printed by Mexico will be sent to countries (focal points) through the Secretariat.)
- Translation of the INSARAG website - (in progress)
- national USAR exercises with regional participation in Peru and Guatemala
- Development of a proposal for an assessment of national USAR capacity in countries of the region
- Organization of an OSOCC Introduction course and the INSARAG regional earthquake simulation response exercise in Mexico, October 2012

The Co-chairs presented the current regional structure and the member countries of the Regional Group with INSARAG focal points, stressing that the appointment of INSARAG focal points by a country should be seen as the country's commitment to work others and based on the INSARAG Guidelines. They also mentioned that one of the big tasks that remained pending was to promote INSARAG with Caribbean countries and their integration into the Regional Group.

2. INSARAG activities at the global level and in the other regions, as well as action points of the 2012 INSARAG Steering Group

The INSARAG Secretariat presented activities of INSARAG worldwide, with a focus on action points from the 2012 Steering Group meeting (see chairman summary of the meeting), the results of the annual INSARAG USAR team leaders' meeting in Australia, the revision scheduled for 2015 of the INSARAG Guidelines, the launch of the INSARAG website, the INSARAG side event at the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July 2012, as well as

the activities of the other Regional Groups. The Secretariat also presented the role of the UNDAC (United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination) team and the current state of implementation of the recommendations that were presented to the UNDAC Advisory Board in 2012 after the review that was conducted in 2011.

3. Urban risk

Ms. Krystell Santamaria, IFRC, gave a presentation on urban risk from a broad perspective of risk management, in view of presenting the general context in which the work of INSARAG lies. She stressed the theme of urban risk as a crosscutting issue that has to be taken into account in all our actions related to risk management, preparedness and response.

4. Procedures for certification / accreditation of national USAR teams

The following presentations were made:

- i. INSARAG Methodology and Guidelines, Chapter "G", Establishing a national urban search and rescue capacity, Joe Bishop, consultant, INSARAG Secretariat
- ii. The Chilean process on INSARAG and a national USAR system, Raul Bustos Zavala, Chile
- iii. The national USAR directory in Mexico, Mrs. Ana Lucia Hill, Mexico
- iv. National accreditation process for light and medium USAR teams – the experience of Peru, Gral EP (r) Murgueytio Alfredo Espinoza, Peru
- v. Experience with national USAR teams in the USA, Sergio Solis, Los Angeles County Fire Department, USA
- vi. USAR capacity building programme of the Regional disaster assistance programme of USAID / OFDA / LAC, Manuel Santana, USAID / OFDA / LAC
- vii. Regional disaster cooperation programme of in Central America, Juan Campos, CEPREDENAC Operational Focal Point

There was not much time left for discussion, yet the presentations emphasized some of the important aspects regarding national USAR processes and the procedures for national USAR certification systems, as follows:

- a. The requirement of ownership of the USAR process by national authorities and those institutions with a lead on the topic;
- b. the importance of institutionalizing the process,
- c. considerations of sustainability of the process, and
- d. the importance of introducing and strengthening USAR capabilities with first responder teams including volunteers.

The INSARAG Guidelines in chapter G promote the use of the INSARAG methodology at the national context as common standards for national USAR teams, with the recommendation that countries adapt the guidelines/methodology to the local context and needs. Certification of national USAR teams is the responsibility and competence of the national system. The INSARAG Guidelines are based on an accumulation of best practices and experience, and it is expected that the use of the INSARAG methodology can improve the interoperability of national USAR teams with international USAR teams when international assistance is required.

5. Update on the IEC process (INSARAG External Classification)

The INSARAG Secretariat presented the key features of the INSARAG External Classification (IEC) system, the current status of classified teams, as well as key stages and conditions for the process of preparing for an IEC as stated in the IEC Handbook. Peru was thanked for translating the IEC Manual with all attachments into Spanish (available on www.insarag.org).

The Secretariat and the Chairman of INSARAG officially presented the Reclassification certificates the USAR teams of Fairfax and Los Angeles, USA. Ms. Sarah Potts, INSARAG focal point of the U.S., received the certificate on behalf of the Fairfax team, and Mr. Sergio Solis, fire captain of Los Angeles, received the certificate on behalf of the team from Los Angeles.

Recommendation 5.1.: USAR teams that have international deployments as part of their mandate are encouraged to prepare for an IEC, with the support of their INSARAG national focal point.

6. Update on the INSARAG Working Groups

The Secretariat presented the context and role of INSARAG Working Groups as well as the work of the three currently existing working groups:

- i. Training Working Group, INSARAG Secretariat because of the absence of a member of the Working Group
- ii. Medical Working Group, INSARAG Secretariat because of the absence of a member of the Working Group
- iii. Operations Working Group, Mocarquer Sebastian, Chile, member of the Working Group

It was recalled that the INSARAG Working Groups were established to support the Secretariat and the INSARAG community in specific areas of work and that they are usually task and time-bound. With regard to the composition of the working groups, the aim is on the one hand to obtain the representation of the three regions, and on the other hand to keep the number of participants limited to ensure a good working environment.

Recommendation 6.1.: Those countries / teams who have an interest in proposing an expert-candidate in the relevant topic to participate in one of the working groups should send a note to the INSARAG Secretariat stating that the person has the support of their institution and of the INSARAG focal point to participate in meetings and carry out the required work, and attaching the proposed expert's CV.

7. Capacity building of national USAR teams and the support that can be offered by international IEC classified teams

The aim of this session was to explore possibilities by which IEC classified teams and the INSARAG Secretariat can provide support to national USAR teams. Participants were divided into three groups with the aim of proposing communication mechanisms / contacts so

that this support can be provided, and of proposing a prioritization of areas and / or types of support to develop. Participants were also asked to review the proposal for the national USAR team capacity assessment tool/ questionnaire and to consider the carrying out of this assessment as a project of the Regional Group.

As regards communication mechanisms, it was recommended that:

- This should be done through the INSARAG focal points, or at least keeping INSARAG focal points informed, and be in line with institutional processes,
- This can be done also through virtual meetings with modern communication technology, without always requiring meetings and workshops in person;
- The INSARAG website and Virtual OSOCC be used more to disseminate experiences and guidance material,
- This should also be promoted through the sub-regional organizations (CEPREDENAC, CAPRADE, CDEMA, REHU) and
- Vice-Chairs of the Regional Group should have a role in facilitating the exchange of experiences and cooperation between countries / teams.

As for the areas / type of support, it was recommended that:

- These should be in accordance with regulations and priorities of each country,
- These be focused on sharing lessons learned
- These be focused on the five components of INSARAG being: management, logistics, medical, search, and rescue, in addition to the specific issues of protocols and work plans and training programmes.

Lastly, it was agreed to carry out the national USAR capacity assessment at the regional level by sending out the questionnaire to the INSARAG focal points, asking them to carry out the necessary consultations at the national level to complete it.

Recommendation 7.1.: It is recommended that USAR teams, focal points and other stakeholders involved in national USAR capacity development consider and follow the above-specified lines of conduct. In this context, international IEC classified USAR teams are particularly encouraged to assist in the capacity building process for national USAR teams in line with Chapter G of the INSARAG Guidelines.

Recommendation 7.2.: INSARAG focal points are asked to send comments on the current format and the questions of the questionnaire on the USAR capacity assessment to the INSARAG Secretariat (schmachtel@un.org) no later than 31 December 2012; the final questionnaire will then be sent to the countries giving three months to carry it out at the national level and send replies to the INSARAG Secretariat for the compilation and final report.

8. INSARAG Governance

The INSARAG Secretariat presented the process that was carried out on the governance discussion, including the first study was done in late 2011 on the challenges of INSARAG governance, the discussion that was held at the annual meeting of the Steering Group in February 2012 in Geneva, Switzerland, and then the consultations and discussions that were carried out, on the basis of the background paper that focal points also received for this meeting, at the annual USAR team leaders meeting as well as the Regional Group meetings.

The three main topics for discussion were presented as follows:

1. Chairmanship (global, regional and at working group level);
2. Membership (in the Steering Group, the Regional Groups, the Working Groups, as well as at the national level the topic of focal points, USAR teams etc.)
3. Decision-making (on institutional matters, on policy issues, and on operational issues)

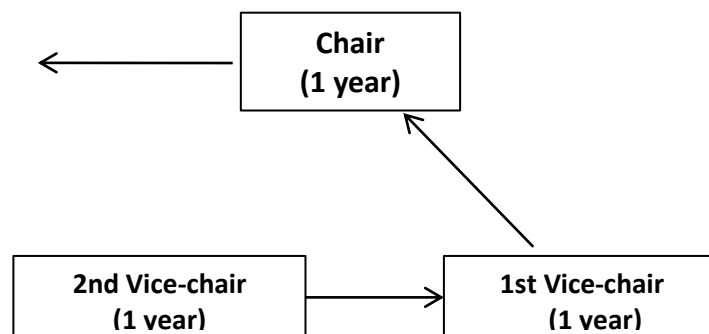
The Secretariat also presented the options and proposals made by the current regional leadership group on governance and specifically on the chairmanship/vice-chairmanship of the Regional Group. The Secretariat also presented the proposal for the planned next revision of the INSARAG Guidelines in 2015. It is proposed to establish a working group in 2013 for which approval is expected by the Steering Group in 2013.

In the plenary discussion on the proposal concerning the regional governance several opinions were voiced on the subject of an election or a nomination by consensus of the Chair and Vice-Chairs. It was also proposed that the Vice-Chairs are appointed based on a geographical criterion in addition to their commitment to the work of INSARAG. It was then agreed to continue this discussion in groups in order to cover the issue of regional governance in more detail but also the other issues identified as current challenges for INSARAG.

Topics discussed and recommendations.

8.1. Regional Chairmanship and Vice-chairmanship

It was recommended that the Americas region adopt the type of regional leadership group described in option (c) of the proposal made in the document of the current Co- and Vice-Chairs (the document was distributed to all participants and focal points of the meeting, see attached). In order words, it was proposed to create a leadership group with a Chair, a 1st Vice-chair and a 2nd Vice-chair. There would be a principle of rotation with a period of one year, ie. the 2nd Vice-Chair in the year x would automatically assume the function of 1st Vice-Chair in the year x +1, and thereafter the function of Chair in the year x +2, and then retire. This proposal considers the aspect of continuity and the possibility to follow up on priorities because a country would need to commit to a total period of three years as part of the leadership group.



With regard to the selection, which according to this model would be only done for the second Vice-chair, it was recommended that it be a designation by consensus. In practical terms, this means that in the first instance there should be a consultation between the candidate countries for the Vice-chairmanship, facilitated by the Secretariat, for them to agree and make a proposal to be adopted by consensus by the Regional Group. If no consensus is reached, a decision needs to be found by proceeding to an election. In such case, each country would have one vote, in the person of the INSARAG political focal point.

It was recommended that nominations to take on the function of second Vice-chair, should be country nominations having the support of national authorities.

In terms of the responsibilities of the Chair and Vice-Chairs, it was recommended that in addition to the items listed in the letter that is addressed to the focal points requesting them to submit the interest of their country to take on the function of Chair and Vice-Chair (example: INSARAG Secretariat letter dated 26 September 2012), the proposals of the current Co-and Vice-chairs be added to it, as well as the following two additional points:

- i) That the Vice-chairs act as link between the Regional Group and the INSARAG Working Groups, and
- ii) That the Vice-chairs act as link between the regional leadership group and the sub-regions.

8.2. Chairmanship of the Working Groups

It was recommended that the chair of a working group be selected by the members of each working group and have this function for a minimum of two years. The chair will have to be an expert in the subject-matter, like any other member of the working group; he/she does not necessarily have to represent a country (ie. the criterion of geographical representation/balance is not considered to be necessary for the function of chair), and as main functions, he/she should have the coordination and ensuring follow up of the work of the group.

8.3. Global chairmanship

This topic was not much discussed; and no specific recommendation was made.

8.4. Membership in the Steering Group

It was recommended that the participants in the INSARAG Steering Group be the political focal points of the member countries. No further specific recommendation was made on this.

8.5. Membership in the Regional Group

It was recommended that participants in the INSARAG Regional Group be the political and operational focal points of the member countries and organizations. It was also recommended that other persons, organizations and / or institutions can be invited based on the discussion

topics of the meeting and the link they have with the work of INSARAG. It was also mentioned that other countries / organizations can be invited as observers.

8.6. Membership in the Working Groups

It was recommended that members of a working group i) should be experts in the subject matter, ii) need to have the institutional support, and iii) be selected by project / by working group (ie. a person should not be able to be member in more than one working group).

8.7. INSARAG national focal points and USAR teams

Considering the terms of reference of the INSARAG focal points as they currently are in the INSARAG Guidelines as reference, it was recommended that the political focal points be i) State representatives linked to the USAR work in their country, and ii) capable of making decisions in the area. With respect to technical/ operational focal points, these should also i) have the ability to make operational decisions, and ii) be experts in the USAR field. It was recommended that a USAR team leader would correspond to the profile of a technical/operational focal point.

It was also recommended that at the national level, INSARAG member countries institutionalize the USAR process by having an institution in charge of it and a legal framework to promote the implementation of the INSARAG Guidelines, adapted to the national/local circumstances; and that this process would allow for a national recognition of the USAR teams in the country. The questionnaire on the assessment of national USAR capacity can be a tool to promote this institutionalization.

8.8. Decision making

Based on the proposal made in the background paper on governance, two recommendations were made, namely i) that there should not be two bodies that can decide on the same subject matter, and ii) that the USAR team leaders should not have the decision-making power without first consulting with operational focal points of member countries.

8.9. Funding

It was recommended that the basic principle of a country's / organization participation in the INSARAG network is that it be committed to provide the necessary financial support for such participation. This means the participation in trainings, exercises and meetings, but it was also highlighted that there are many activities that one can do at no or low cost, including virtual meetings, written correspondence, etc. In addition, it was mentioned that there is the possibility of obtaining external sponsorship to finance participation in many events.

9. Designation of the next Chair and Vice-chairs for 2013

The recommendation on the type of regional leadership and the designation process mentioned in point 8.1 was adopted by consensus.

For 2013, the following specific proposal was adopted by consensus:

- i) Extend the period of the current leadership group until March 2013; and
- ii) Designate Costa Rica as Chair, Peru as 1st Vice-chair, and Chile as 2nd Vice-chair until the end of 2013
- iii) Designate Colombia – who also had expressed interest in taking on the role of Vice-chair – as 2nd Vice-chair for 2014

10. Planning of activities for the INSARAG Regional Group in 2013

Ms. Hill (Mexico) and Mr. Perez (Costa Rica) summarized their pending commitments as part of their current work plan:

- The distribution of INSARAG guidelines (*action*: Mexico and Secretariat)
- Translation of the website www.insarag.org (*action*: Costa Rica and Secretariat)
- The national USAR capacity assessment (*action*: country focal points, Mexico and Secretariat)
- Clarification of the use of social networks, facebook and twitter (*Action*: Co-and Vice-Chairs and Secretariat)

Regarding the planning of activities for 2013, Costa Rica confirmed the organization of the annual Regional Meeting in San Jose for November 2013; Peru confirmed its interest in hosting/ organizing the INSARAG regional earthquake simulation response exercise for the second half of 2013; and Chile offered to host an OSOCC course to promote the OSOCC methodology in its country and regional involvement.

Action: The incoming Chair and Vice-Chairs and the Secretariat should develop a work plan for 2013 and share with focal points for their comments when they start in their functions in March 2013.

11. Announcement of international events by countries

- Colombia announced the organization on 9 and 10 November 2012 of a simulation on the eruption of the Volcano Nevado del Ruiz, in two departments, with 37 different scenarios, including a scenario of urban search and rescue, on health, on hazardous materials and others.
- Peru announced the organization of a national simulation on 15 November 2012, which involved the Humanitarian Country Team. Countries interested in participating as observers are invited to contact the focal points of Peru.
- Peru and Ecuador also announced the organization in early 2013 of a bi-national simulation. Peru will communicate the exact date at a later stage.
- Honduras invited El Salvador and Guatemala to organize a tri-national earthquake response simulation in 2013.

12. Acknowledgements

The INSARAG Secretariat and all meeting participants would like to thank the Government of Costa Rica for hosting the meeting.

- end -

Annex:

- A. Participant list**
- B. Proposal for the Chairmanship/ Vice chairmanship of the INSARAG Americas Regional Group**
- C. Proposal for a national USAR team capacity assessment tool in the Americas Region**