

## XII Meeting of the INSARAG Americas Regional Group

Chairman summary  
San José, Costa Rica, 3-5 December 2013



INSARAG Secretariat

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

The XII meeting of the INSARAG Regional Group of the Americas was held on 3-5 December 2013 in San Jose, Costa Rica. It was hosted by the Government of Costa Rica in its capacity as Chair of the Regional Group and organized jointly with the I and II Vice-chair, Peru and Chile respectively, as well as with 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 Tania Chapuisat, UNICEF Representative in Costa Rica on behalf of the UN Resident Coordinator, as well as Mr. Terje Skavdal INSARAG Secretary/OCHA each gave a keynote address.

The meeting gathered a total of 52 participants from 13 countries of the region, all represented by their INSARAG focal points or in representation of their focal point, and two regional organizations (CEPREDENAC and CDEMA), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Dialogue on Disaster Response Initiative, OCHA, and Singapore as Chair of the INSARAG Asia-Pacific Regional Group as well as Switzerland and France as observer.

The following topics were discussed in the meeting:

1. INSARAG in the Americas – activities of 2013 and follow up to action points from the 2012 Regional Group meeting
2. INSARAG global activities and follow up to action points from the 2013 INSARAG Steering Group meeting
3. Update on the INSARAG Working Groups
4. The INSARAG regional earthquake response simulation exercise – SIMEX 2013 in Peru
5. The capacity assessment of national USAR teams in the Americas
6. Update on the INSARAG external classification (IEC) process
7. The INSARAG Guidelines revision
8. The INSARAG Strategy 2014-2017
9. The case study of the response to the collapse of the Space building in Medellin, Colombia
10. The earthquake early warning system in Mexico
11. Strengthening national capacities – exchange of experience
12. Disaster response dialogue (as extracurricular session on the agenda)
13. The role of INSARAG focal points and the interaction with the chairmanship group and the INSARAG Secretariat
14. Proposals and commitments for the work plan 2014
15. Announcement of international events by countries
16. Designation of the next Chairmanship group for 2014

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 INSARAG website [www.insarag.org](http://www.insarag.org).

## 1. INSARAG in the Americas – activities of 2013 and follow up to action points from the 2012 Regional Group meeting

The Chairman of the Regional Group, Mr. Sigifredo Pérez (Costa Rica), presented the 2013 report of activities of the INSARAG Americas Regional Group, focusing on an update of the current composition of the regional group, the participation of the regional group and its representation in INSARAG global activities, and on the activities and products of the Regional Group in 2013. He emphasized the important achievement reached with the regional capacity assessment of national USAR teams in the Americas region, but stressed that the process is not finalized yet and that it will need to continue (See Annex C). He also stressed the positive development of the increasing participation of countries and organizations from the Caribbean in the Regional Group.

Mr. Raul Bustos (Chile) reported on the organization of the OSOCC Course organized in Chile from 27 to 30 November 2013 and showed a video of the course.

Finally, Mr. Perez showed a draft video of INSARAG in the Americas as one of this year's products of the Regional Group, produced by the National Emergency Commission (CNE) of Costa Rica with contributions from several members of the Regional Group. All participants were invited to make their comments to Mr. Reinaldo Carballo Fonseca (rcarballo@cne.go.cr), journalist of the CNE of Costa Rica in order to make any necessary adjustments.

**Recommendation 1.1.:** Regional Group members are encouraged to provide their comments on the video to Mr. Reinaldo Carballo Fonseca (rcarballo@cne.go.cr) with copy to the INSARAG Secretariat (schmachtel@un.org) latest by 15 January 2014. – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DHaXq1nzB50>.

## 2. INSARAG global activities and follow up to action points from the 2013 INSARAG Steering Group meeting

Mr. Terje Skavdal, INSARAG Secretary, presented the INSARAG worldwide activities of 2013, recalling the beginning of the work on the INSARAG Guidelines review, the proposal for the INSARAG Strategy 2014-2017 and the INSARAG global team leaders' meeting, which was held in the Netherlands in September. He also presented the outcomes of the governance discussions in the INSARAG Steering Group meeting. The summary of the outcomes can be found in the presentation as well as in annex C of the Chairman summary of the ISG 2013.

## 3. Update on the INSARAG Working Groups

The INSARAG Secretariat presented the role of the INSARAG Working Groups as well as the work of the three following groups, considering that the Operations working group finalized its work and the presentation therefore was the final one:

- I. Training Working Group, INSARAG Secretariat presented in the absence of a representative from the WG
- II. Medical Working Group, INSARAG Secretariat presented in the absence of a representative from the WG
- III. Operations Working Group, Sebastián Mocarquer, Chile, presented as member of the WG

**Recommendation 3.1.:** The same recommendation of 2012 is kept encouraging those countries / teams who have an interest in proposing an expert-candidate in the relevant topic to participate in one of the working groups (in this case the Training and/or the Medical WG) to 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. Nomination of candidates should reach the Secretariat latest by 31 January to be considered.

**NB:** The following is a reminder on the conditions and profile required of the candidates:

The candidates should

- Be endorsed by the INSARAG focal point of the respective country and be funded to participate in the WG by the Government or his/her institution
- Be a subject matter expert recognized as such by his/her country or institution and have the relevant experience and qualifications
- Have a good knowledge of the INSARAG guidelines and methodology
- Be able to speak, read and write in English
- Participate in all the meetings of the WG

#### 4. The INSARAG regional earthquake response simulation exercise – SIMEX 2013 in Peru

General Murgeytio, I Vice-chair of the Regional Group and Head of the INDECI, Peru, presented the main aspects of the regional exercise – SIMEX 2013, which was held from 1-4 October in Lima, Peru. The presentation covered the scenario of the exercise, which was based on the actual studies that were carried out, the scope of the exercise, the achieved objectives, and main lessons learned and a series of conclusions. The video of the exercise was also shown which can be found on the INDECI channel in youtube at:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwWYvzezGQw>

The conclusions and main lessons learnt can be summarized as follows:

- It is crucial that the exercise serve as an opportunity to put into practice the actual plans of the country and how the INSARAG methodology related to them
- Participants in the exercise should be those who have the same functions in an emergency at the country level (ie. LEMA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, migration, customs, national teams, Humanitarian Country Team)
- The success of the exercise is directly proportional to the efforts invested in the planning of it.
  - In Peru, the preparation of the exercise started with more than 6 month lead time
  - It is important that those who plan and prepare for the exercise are staff of the national system/LEMA since this ensures the learning process and ownership remains with the national system.
  - It is recommended to carry out 2 prior planning visits of the international planning team
    - 1<sup>st</sup> visit: minimum 6 months before the exercise focusing on the logistic requirements and sharing the exercise design and methodology
    - 2<sup>nd</sup> visit: 2 months before the exercise to review in detail all the exercise timelines, tasks and injects, adapted to the country situation.
  - Define clearly the specific learning objectives of each group of participants in order to ensure the best possible learning outcome for all
  - It should be considered to draft a final report, focusing on lessons learned of the participants and the exercise control group, for dissemination.

The Secretariat encouraged all countries who are interested in hosting and organizing an INSARAG regional exercise to take into consideration the lessons learned of the 2013 SIMEX in Peru. In addition, the Secretariat thanked once again all countries and organizations that have contributed to the holding of the exercise including Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, USA, Switzerland and IFRC. The exercise was the product of a regional cooperation and the Regional Group was encouraged to maintain the same dynamic.

#### 5. The capacity assessment of national USAR teams in the Americas

Mr. Juan Campos (CEPREDENAC) and Mr. Walter Fonseca (Costa Rica) presented the preliminary findings of the capacity assessment of national USAR teams in the Americas. 10 out of 21 countries with officially designated INSARAG focal points completed the questionnaire in line with the agreement reached at the 2012 Regional Group meeting. The preliminary findings show a total of 96 USAR teams in these 10 countries, which provided information, taking into account that the reported team size varies from 12 to 210 members.

A series of preliminary conclusions were presented which were then discussed in the meeting. The Regional Group requested the Chairmanship group to prioritize the recommendations and propose a process for their validation by the Regional Group. A particular emphasis was put on the need for more support from the INSARAG Secretariat/OCHA at the political level to promote national capacity development processes in the countries.

Additional time will be given to those countries who did not manage to complete the questionnaire yet; and Costa Rica committed to presenting the final report to the Chairmanship group. It was not possible to present it for the meeting due to the fact that most questionnaires were received a few days only before the meeting.

***Recommendation 5.1.:*** Countries who were not able to complete the questionnaire on the capacity assessment are encouraged to do so in order to obtain a full picture of the state of the national USAR teams in the región, and to submit the completed questionnaires to the Secretariat ([schmachtel@un.org](mailto:schmachtel@un.org), [perez1@un.org](mailto:perez1@un.org), [insarag@un.org](mailto:insarag@un.org)) latest by 14 February 2014

***Recommendation 5.2.:*** The Regional Chairmanship Group is requested to prioritize the recommendations and propose a process for their validation by the Regional Group.

## 6. Update on the INSARAG external classification (IEC) process

The Secretariat presented the current situation of the INSARAG external classification process (IEC) mentioning that 36 teams have so far been classified worldwide (23 heavy teams and 13 medium teams) with 22 additional teams in the waiting list until 2017.

Mr. Joe Bishop, consultant of the Secretariat and currently mentor of two heavy USAR teams from France (Military Civil Protection Units, UIISC 1 y UIISC 2) presented the preparation process for the IEC classification due in 2014.

Lastly, Mr. Anwar Abdullah, from Singapore, representing the Chair of the Asia Pacific Regional Group presented the proposal of his country for a modification of the re-classification process of already classified teams which aims at simplifying the whole process.

**Recommendation 6.1.:** The same recommendation of 2012 is kept whereby 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. Additionally, these teams are encouraged to take into consideration the waiting list that is building up for IECs and that they therefore should inform the Secretariat of their interest as soon as possible in order to establish a work programme. Reference: IEC/R Handbook, [www.insarag.org](http://www.insarag.org)

## 7. The INSARAG Guidelines revision

Mr. Sebastián Mocarquer (Chile), member of the INSARAG Guidelines Review Working Group, presented the progress in the revision of the INSARAG guidelines review following the first meeting of the Working Group, which was held in Geneva, Switzerland in June 2013. He recalled that all focal points received the summary of the WG meeting. He presented the revised structure of the Guidelines consisting of three volumes, separating out the policy issues from the operational topics. Vol. I will be the INSARAG policy guidelines; Vol. II will be the operational guidelines, and Vol. III will be the Fieldbook. Technical guidance notes will continue to exist and will be available in the INSARAG library on [www.insarag.org](http://www.insarag.org). Mr. Mocarquer informed the Regional Group also of the plans to share the first version of the Policy Guidelines in January 2014 asking for comments from all INSARAG focal points until 24 January 2014 so that they can be included in the draft which will be presented to the INSARAG Steering Group in February 2014.

In the discussion that followed the presentation, members of the Regional Group raised their concerns with regard to the short deadlines for the consultation on the Guidelines with the Regional Groups. If the process does not include ample time for consultations it runs the risk of being too rushed. It was mentioned that regional organizations should also be included in the consultation process. In addition, questions were raised on the follow up to the work of the Operations WG and which parts of the accomplished work would be taken into account in the revision of the Guidelines.

The Secretariat clarified that the period in January 2014 to provide comments on Vol I of the Guidelines should be seen as the first phase of the consultation. It is not expected to have any endorsement of Vol. I by the Steering Group in 2014; there will also be no endorsement by the annual INSARAG team leaders meeting in 2014. The Secretariat stressed that the consultation process is very important and that it will insist in that all those who need to have ownership of the topic should be consulted, especially the INSARAG political and operational focal points. The 2014 meetings of the Regional Groups will be part of the formal consultation process. The Secretariat also clarified that regional organizations should be consulted as part of the respective Regional Groups. With regard to the inclusion of the proposals by the OWG, the Secretariat specified that the two TL representatives on the GRG were tasked with the responsibility to follow up on the final report of the OWG as part of the Guidelines review and that the Training WG now was asked to develop an implementation plan for relevant parts of the OWG proposal.

Peru informed that in its capacity as incoming Chair of the Regional Group it will designate the country's operational focal point as focal point to channel and consolidate all comments from the Regional Group to the revision of the Guidelines.

**Recommendation 7.1.:** *The Regional Group was encouraged to use all opportunities to provide input to the revision of the Guidelines, starting with the first phase in January 2014 on Vol. I. All members of the Regional Group are encouraged to channel their comments through Cesar Villegas ([cvillegas@bomberosperu.gob.pe](mailto:cvillegas@bomberosperu.gob.pe)), focal point designated for this by Peru and the Americas focal point of the Secretariat, Christophe Schmachtel ([schmachtel@un.org](mailto:schmachtel@un.org)).*

## 8. The INSARAG Strategy 2014-2017

The comments by the Americas regional Group on the strategy as well as the contextualization of the strategy to the region can be found in annex B.

## 9. The case study of the response to the collapse of the Space building in Medellin, Colombia

Dr. Carlos Ivan Marquez, Director of the National Disaster Risk Management Unit (UNGRD) of Colombia and INSARAG political focal point, and Mr. Carlos Alberto Gil, Director of the Administrative Department of Disaster Risk Management of Medellin, Colombia, presented the key stages of the response to the collapse of the building space in Medellin, Colombia in which 11 persons died, 525 people were evacuated, and 2 persons injured. The operation lasted a total of 16 days and involved 9 USAR groups and a total of 375 people. Two videos illustrating the response work were shown: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcZSpmci9fU> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcZSpmci9fU>.

Beyond the domestic legal procedures to determine the civil and criminal liability of what had happened, the National Disaster Risk Management Unit (UNGRD) of Colombia is using this experience to update national protocols for action, to strengthen in short and medium term the national system in general and more specifically the process used at country level.

## 10. The earthquake early warning system in Mexico

Mr. Gilberto Castelan Pescina, Director of instrumentation and computing of Mexico's National Centre for Prevention of Disasters (CENAPRED), presented the early warning alert for earthquakes in Mexico (SASMEX), which operates since 1991; emphasis was placed on the particularity of the seismicity that occurs in Mexico, which makes it possible for an early warning system to operate. The alert that is given to the cities depends on the intensity and the distance of the epicenter of the quake and there can be up to 80 seconds of notice to the population which allows to take preventive action to save lives, depending on the characteristics of some buildings, these could be evacuated. The presentation was complemented by Lic. Ricardo de la Cruz Musalem, Director General of Civil Protection of Mexico who invited all interested parties to visit the facilities of CENAPRED and SASMEX in Mexico, Mr. De La Cruz Musalem also informed of the collaboration agreement with the United States for the installation of a similar early warning system in California.

## 11. Strengthening national capacities – exchange of experience

The aim of this session was to provide an opportunity for countries and organizations of the regional group to exchange experiences on key topics for strengthening capacities at national level. The topics were selected based on the results of the regional meeting of last year.

- Peru presented its experience focusing on the aspect of the institutionalization of the search and rescue service at country level;
- Costa Rica focused its presentation on the issue of sustainability with an emphasis on the need to establish a base platform for response capacities in the country;
- CEPREDENAC presented the regional experience on the process of establishing a Central American Task Force (FTC) for which CEPREDENAC has made use of the INSARAG Guidelines, particularly chapter G to organize, at regional level, the establishment of USAR groups (first response);
- The United States introduced the training program and training manual of the federal emergency management agency (FEMA) applicable to all 28 teams in country which are a part of the national USAR response system established in 1989; and finally,
- Chile presented the process for national accreditation established at country level after the experience of the earthquake of 27/02/2010 which aims at identifying, accrediting and registering USAR groups according to standards adopted and adapted from the INSARAG guidelines and the INSARAG methodology, following pre-established procedures in a National Operations System (SNO).

## 12. Disaster Response Dialogue

This session was incorporated in the agenda to give a space for a consultation on “ The Disaster Response Dialogue”, a joint initiative of the IFRC, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies, OCHA and the Government of Switzerland, together with the INSARAG focal points of the Americas Regional Group.

Please see annex D for a summary of this consultation.

### **13. The role of INSARAG focal points and the interaction with the chairmanship group and the INSARAG Secretariat**

Based on the Chairmanship's group experience of this year on the subject of the relationship and interaction with the INSARAG focal points, the Secretariat introduced briefly the basic functions of the focal points in accordance with the functioning of the INSARAG network. A key aspect of this is that the focal points are responsible to ensure a more efficient information exchange at national level, and with their partners at the international level as well as with the Chairmanship Group and the Secretariat. It was mentioned that there were communication difficulties between the focal points and the Chairmanship group and the need to maintain a more fluid communication was discussed. Haiti requested French to also be taken into consideration for communications within the regional group.

***Recommendation 13.1.:*** *It is recommended to INSARAG focal points to inform the secretariat of any contact details update and to maintain a fluid communication between focal points, the Chairmanship group and the secretariat. (Focal point contact details can be found in the INSARAG directory under: <http://www.insarag.org/es/directorio/dir-usa.html>)*

### **14. Proposals and commitments for the 2014 work plan**

#### ***INSARAG Regional exercises***

- Costa Rica proposed to organize the regional earthquake simulation exercise in 2014;
- Chile confirmed its interest in organizing the exercise for 2015;
- The Dominican Republic informed of its interest in organizing the exercise in 2016, mentioning that it still has to make the relevant consultations at national level.

Decision was taken to wait until December 20 2013 for interested countries to organize the 2014 and 2015 exercises in order to allow them to make relevant consultations at national level.

***Recommendation 14.1.:*** *Countries interested in formalizing their wish to hold the 2014 and 2015 exercises are requested to do so through a formal note to the Secretariat before 20 December 2013.*

#### ***Meeting of the Regional Group in 2014***

Peru in its capacity of President of the INSARAG Regional Group for 2014, announced the date for next meeting for the week of 17 November 2014 in Lima, Peru.

#### ***INSARAG Guidelines***

- Chile offered to print 2000 copies of the current version of the INSARAG guidelines to be distributed in the region.

#### ***Workshop proposals***

- Chile offered to sponsor one or two workshops, one in the first quarter of 2014, on specific topics such as the development of national capacities processes, i.e. the national certification of USAR team's process or on the manual of national capacities development, in order to facilitate mutual learning and exchange of concrete experiences. The definition of topics will be proposed by the chairmanship group
- Peru offered to host the USAR regional team leaders meeting in August 2014.

#### ***Miscellaneous***

- Peru informed of its interest in naming an expert for the medical working group
- Chile informed of its interest of naming an expert each for the medical working group and for the training working group
- Cuba committed itself to naming an operational focal point.
- The IFRC recalled of the complementarity between the Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and INSARAG, and encouraged all countries, as well as the regional and global levels to take advantage of all opportunities to get to know each other and to collaborate more closely.

- Colombia emphasized the need to generate a plan of action with indicators that will be passed on to the next chairmanship.

## 15. Announcement of international events by countries

- Ecuador announced the organization of the Fourth Session of the Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction of the Americas, to be held from Tuesday 27 to Thursday 29 of May, 2014 in Guayaquil Ecuador.
- The Secretariat announced the date for the INSARAG Steering Group meeting to be held from 13 to 14 February 2014.
- The Secretariat announced the possible organization of an information session with the Permanent Missions to the UN in Geneva in the margins of the INSARAG Steering Group meeting on 14 February 2014.

## 16. Designation of the next Chairmanship group for 2014

The appointment of Mr. Carlos Ivan Marquez from Colombia as incoming II Vice-chairman of the regional group for 2014 was confirmed, Mr. Cristobal Goñi from Chile as I Vice-Chair and General Alfredo Murgueytio of Peru as Chairman of the regional group for 2014.

The new Chairmanship group called upon all the members of the regional group for their cooperation in order to achieve the objectives jointly; and invited to focus on some specific issues and to facilitate communication amongst focal points, and committed to provide follow-up to the for 2014-2017 strategy.

The Secretariat and the regional group thanked Costa Rica, and particularly Mr. Sigifredo Perez and his team for having taken up the challenge of leading the regional group in this transition phase and congratulated them for their fundamental role in having achieved a stable system of governance of the regional group, a more active participation of all Governments, and a more positive dynamic of working between all members of the regional group.

## 17. Acknowledgements

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

- End -

## Annexes:

- A. List of participants
- B. INSARAG Strategy 2014-2017, with input from the Americas Regional Group
- C. Questionnaire for the Capacity assessment of national USAR teams in the Americas
- D. Summary of the session on the “Disaster Response Dialogue”