

## How to promote national USAR capacity strengthening based on the INSARAG Guidelines and ensure complementarity of the international response?

### 1. Background

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Since 2005, INSARAG has an external USAR team classification process, which establishes verifiable operational standards and which constitutes an example of how a peer review mechanism can provide an added value in the preparedness and response to disasters. The process, known as IEC, is designed for teams that have the mandate and institutional support for responding internationally. They have the support of the national authorities of their respective country through the INSARAG focal point. The IEC is an independent, verifiable and voluntary process that has received unanimous acceptance by the INSARAG community. The main objective of the process is to provide countries affected by disasters with an additional resource, with proven quality and capacity according to international standards.

INSARAG does not classify national teams, as this is a responsibility of the national authorities in each country. A national USAR team accreditation system allows for the establishment of common national minimum standards, based on experience, local needs and risk scenarios of each country.

Since 2003, and particularly in the Americas region, a series of initiatives have been discussed, analysed and developed aimed at establishing a process whereby USAR teams should achieve some basic recommended standards in order to be called *National USAR teams*. This is due to the huge number of teams that have emerged, with very limited capacities to assist those affected after an earthquake. These teams are causing difficulties to both the national emergency systems and to the affected countries receiving these resources/ teams in an emergency. They have become an additional burden on the national emergency response system.

In 2011, and following a global consultation process, the new chapter G on establishing a national urban search and rescue capacity was incorporated in the INSARAG Guidelines. In paragraph G3.5, this version of the Guidelines of 2011 already encourages countries to "*adopt (at the appropriate level) the INSARAG organizational and operational guidelines for capacity building of national USAR teams as a target achievement for its national USAR teams and to adopt appropriate processes for the confirmation of achievement of these standards*".

The updated INSARAG Guidelines 2015 include a complete manual on strengthening national and local capacity building (Vol. II, Manual A) and goes as far as recommending countries to establish a national USAR team accreditation mechanism to allow a country to "*manage, monitor and establish the same standards officially and adhere closely to the INSARAG standards and guidance in developing its USAR national response systems*". The Guidelines recommend a process that was designed in a workshop carried out in Chile in 2014 and which incorporates many of the lessons learned in the Americas region in the past few years.

Several countries and regional organizations in the Americas region have established or are in the process of establishing accreditation processes for their national USAR teams such as Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru and CEPREDENAC to mention only a few.

## 2. Analysis

The INSARAG strategy adopted in 2014 and reconfirmed in the 2015 Global Meeting established “**inclusiveness**” as one of the main values of INSARAG, encouraging “disaster-prone countries to join the network, as well as any country or organization with USAR response capacities”. However, not having a recognition mechanism of national USAR teams, INSARAG runs the risk of being seen as an exclusive club of the few USAR teams with the capacity to respond internationally.

Today more than eighty countries and organizations form part of INSARAG under the umbrella of the United Nations, generating substantive contributions to the development of the methodology. However, in the Americas region and possibly in other regions or sub-regions, the INSARAG process is still seen to be very distant given that – although a lot of work is undertaken on strengthening national capacities – the INSARAG classification model is only designed for international teams.



The USAR response framework of INSARAG shows a structure, which aims to ensure **interoperability** between different levels of USAR response and determines that “*it is vital that working practices, technical language and information are common and shared through all levels of the USAR response framework*” (INSARAG Guidelines, Vol I, 2.1). Therefore, the standards developed for the accreditation of national teams **must be aligned with** the INSARAG methodology and therefore should be recognized within this same framework.

This proposal would see the national USAR process as integral part of the INSARAG process. It would serve as an incentive and avoid duplication of activities. Additionally, it would be beneficial to the IEC process, since it could reduce the duration of its preparation. National USAR teams would be recognized within the overall process of INSARAG, through a shared responsibility with the national governments and disaster management authorities, in verifying compliance with the standards.

It is argued that the proposal would bring mutual benefit to the international and national response capacity by:

- Having a national USAR standard that can be “certified” by national authorities, and which would define the organisation of the domestic response, adapting international guidelines such as the INSARAG Guidelines to the realities of each country
- Having verified capacities and activation and coordination mechanisms at national level
- Having a national USAR standard that although adapted to each country is in line with the INSARAG guidelines, in terms of interoperability, minimum standards, implementation of lessons learnt and experience
- Having a publically available list of national USAR teams, duly recognized and accredited by their national authorities in the INSARAG directory

### 3. Proposal and elements for discussion

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Globally and particularly in the Americas region there is extensive experiences with accreditation processes of national USAR teams, some developed jointly, some individually by countries and institutions. In general, all have preserved a similar structure, both in terms of processes and in terms of standards, closely linked to the methodology developed by INSARAG for the IEC.

It is desirable as mentioned earlier that the national accreditation processes form an integral part of the INSARAG process in order to ensure interoperability and appropriate interaction between the national and international response capacity. To this effect, one should count on a certain homogenization of national USAR standards, leaving the required space for national adaptation. The INSARAG Guidelines in their current version already provide a minimum standard applicable for national USAR teams.

It is desirable for INSARAG to provide some kind of recognition for national USAR teams which have demonstrated their commitment and response capacity in accordance with the INSARAG Guidelines. It is a way of concretely showing and living up to the basic value of “inclusiveness” of INSARAG and to promote national capacity strengthening.

It is not desirable nor feasible that INSARAG takes on the responsibility to accredit or classify the huge amount of national USAR teams. This remains the sole responsibility of the national authorities as again validated by the INSARAG Guidelines 2015.

INSARAG has acquired a vast experience with the IEC process which can be analysed more systematically in order to provide recommendations on national accreditation processes.

Based on the role of INSARAG to actively support the strengthening of capacities at international, regional, sub regional, and national and in compliance of the INSARAG Abu Dhabi Declaration 2015, particularly its paragraph 8<sup>1</sup> as well as the recommendation 2.2 of the INSARAG Americas regional Group meeting in Abu Dhabi<sup>2</sup>, the following proposal is being presented:

***“Design a certification/ peer review process of national USAR team accreditation processes, which confirms to the country that it is complying with the minimum standards in its national USAR team accreditation process”***

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<sup>1</sup> 8. Recognizes the work undertaken by INSARAG to develop innovations in and recommendations for operational and organizational guidelines for the capacity-building of national USAR teams, and encourages Member States to support such efforts, fully recognizing that international response is a complement to national capacity.

<sup>2</sup> Recommendation 2.2.: It is recommended that the Regional Group consider the drafting of a proposal to certify national USAR team accreditation processes.

## Key questions discussed

The discussion at the ISG meeting was focused on three key elements, using the below questions as a guidance. The three elements were:

- i. arguments in favour of the project proposal,
- ii. arguments against the project proposal, and
- iii. should the project go ahead, what conditions/criteria need to be considered.

Text in red shows the comments provided in the Steering Group meeting. Text in black was

- What would be the advantage and the added value for INSARAG to have a certification/ review process of national USAR team accreditation processes?
  - It will promote worldwide minimum standards for USAR assistance
  - It strengthens interoperability amongst national and international teams
  - It will promote the exchange of experience and capacity strengthening
  - It will ensure greater inclusiveness of the INSARAG network
  - There was concern that, whilst being a worthwhile project to pursue in the future, it may not be the immediate priority for INSARAG
- What would be the advantage and the added value for the interested Government and the national teams to have a certification/ review process of the national USAR team accreditation process?
  - Interoperability with international teams, in cases of major emergencies requiring international cooperation
  - It will foster greater international recognition of the national capacity strengthening process (by INSARAG)
  - It will also foster greater and more institutionalised recognition of the national teams by their national Government
- Would Governments/ national systems accept such an external review system of national accreditation systems?
  - The IEC process already enjoyed a high level of acceptability
  - Indications from the Americas regional show more than a level of acceptability, already an actual demand
  - Acceptability may be limited by Governments who already have an established national accreditation system
- What would be the minimum criteria and the conditions what such a process would need to guarantee for it to be acceptable to the INSARAG community?
  - Have minimum evaluation criteria, both at the level of the process as well as at the level of quality/capacity standards for the teams, and it needs to include respect for fundamental principles and core values of INSARAG.
  - A review of the national minimum standards currently in the Guidelines, with possible need for further explaining them for the purpose of the proposal
  - It should have minimum cost implications
  - It should build on Vol II Manual A as well as carefully study existing national accreditation systems as well as the IEC system and incorporate the experiences.
  - It should start as a pilot project, led by the Americas region with interested governments from other regions joining.

- The proposal needs to be based on a voluntary process, nothing should be imposed
- It should be clear that this is not a proposal to water down the IEC process and the standards for international teams but rather strengthen national capacity and national teams
- What form of recognition could the INSARAG community offer national USAR teams that have demonstrated their commitment and capacity in line with such a national accreditation process?
  - A clear and visible recognition of national teams is seen positive as it will promote the inclusiveness of the INSARAG network but should be based on conditions that need to be clearly developed
  - This recognition could include an INSARAG national patch that would be distinct from the IEC patch.
- What would be the capacities required to be able to carry out such a review process? What would be the division of responsibilities? Where would the ownership lie?
  - Before defining responsibilities, the process would need to clearly define the tasks to be carried out. Once these tasks are clear, responsibilities should be clarified based on the premise that the national accreditation process will remain under the full authority of the national authorities.
  - In this regard the proposal should clarify tasks and responsibilities of:
    - The national USAR teams
    - The national authorities
    - The Regional Groups
    - The Secretariat;
    - And any other actor considered relevant in the process.

#### 4. Next steps

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- i. Further to the discussion at the ISG meeting 2016, there was general agreement with the next steps proposed in the paper, suggesting that the Americas Region develop the proposal with interested Governments from other regions, and consult with the other regions and report back to the INSARAG Steering Group in 2017.
- ii. The proposal will be further developed but in general is expected to follow the phases:
  - Phase 1: Studies which would include:
    - analysis of existing experiences with national accreditation and peer review processes in the regions and globally as well as the IEC process
    - update of the regional capacity assessment of national USAR teams in the Americas region, amongst others.
  - Phase 2: Conceptualization and design of the process
    - ➔ Colombia, in its current capacity of Chair of the Americas Regional Group, offers to host a workshop with the objective to review and discuss the above-mentioned phases 1 and 2.
  - Phase 3: Pilot process and implementation in an interested country (ies)
  - Phase 4: Evaluation and follow up.