

XIV Annual Meeting of the INSARAG Americas Regional Group

Chairman Summary
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 20 October 2015

INSARAG Secretariat
Field Coordination Support Section
Emergency Services Branch
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Chairman Summary

The XIV meeting of the INSARAG Americas Regional Group was held on 20 October 2015 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates in conjunction with the II INSARAG Global Meeting. It was hosted by the Government of the United Arab Emirates in its capacity as host of the INSARAG Global Meeting, chaired by the Government of Chile in its capacity as Regional Chair and organized jointly with the I and II Vice-chair, Colombia and Ecuador respectively, as well as with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) in its capacity as INSARAG Secretariat.

The meeting was opened by Mr. Camilo Grez, representing the Chair of the INSARAG Americas Regional Group, Mr. Ricardo Toro, National Director of ONEMI/Chile who could not attend the meeting in person. Ms. Wendy Cue, Head of the OCHA Regional Office in Panama and Mr. Winston Chang of the INSARAG Secretariat/ OCHA Geneva also gave opening speeches.

The meeting gathered a total of 34 participants from 14 countries of the region, 1 regional organization (CEPREDENAC), 1 non-governmental organisation (IRO) as well as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in its capacity of INSARAG Secretariat. The countries and organizations were all represented by their INSARAG focal points or in delegation of the focal points.

The following topics were discussed in the meeting:

1. INSARAG in the Region – Action Points from 2014 & Activities of 2015
2. Experience from recent emergencies in the region with activation of USAR teams
3. INSARAG Regional Exercise – SIMEX 2015 and National USAR Exercises – Exchange of Experience and Lessons Learned
4. Progress in Strengthening USAR Capacities at National and Regional Levels
5. Proposals for Implementation of INSARAG Training in the Region
6. Evaluation of the Regional Strategy and Priorities for 2016, in line with Results of the Global Meeting
7. Designation of the Regional Chairmanship Group for 2016
8. Announcements of International/Regional Events

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.

1. INSARAG in the Region – Action Points from 2014 & Activities of 2015

Chile presented the 2015 report of activities of the INSARAG Americas Regional Group. In addition to presenting the status of implementation of the recommendations from the annual meeting of last year, Chile emphasized the way the Regional Chairmanship had translated these recommendations into a work plan with concrete activities. The work plan for 2015 was designed to be simpler than the previous year and served as the basis for monitoring activities throughout the year.

Although Ecuador made mention of the progress that occurred this year in the communication between focal points and the Regional Chairmanship Group, Chile spoke of the frustration that existed when attempting to contact focal points of countries without success. Ecuador suggested that the region should work on the basis of the good practices established with Whatsapp groups and shared folders in Dropbox for example and possibly find other forms of communicating between focal points so that this interaction is not reduced to the annual meeting of the Regional Group.

Both Chile and Argentina mentioned the need to improve planning and coordination of Regional Group activities with those activities of countries and other agencies that are related to the work of INSARAG. Mention is made particularly of a USAR forum organized in Panama in the same week as the INSARAG Global and Regional Meetings in Abu Dhabi and which was not coordinated with INSARAG country focal points. It was also requested to take into account key national holidays when planning INSARAG events and not to plan activities too close to each other.

The group welcomed the regional process undertaken for the review of the translation of the INSARAG Guidelines. However, it was requested to do a final open review process as well as to create a glossary of technical terms that may be used differently from one country to another.

Recommendation 1.1.: *The communication between focal points and the Regional Chairmanship group should be strengthened and better ways should be found to ensure this communication. It is important that the responsibility for this communication be shared between focal points and the members of the Regional Chairmanship Group.*

Recommendation 1.2.: *All countries and organizations that organize USAR / INSARAG related activities are requested to coordinate these activities through the INSARAG focal points, respecting the institutional framework of each country, and in order to ensure the most appropriate participation in each event.*

Recommendation 1.3.: *The Regional Chairmanship group and the Secretariat as well as all countries are requested to avoid planning INSARAG or INSARAG-related activities too close to each other in terms of timing.*

Recommendation 1.4.: *Members of the INSARAG Regional Group are requested to send their comments/ corrections of the translation to Spanish of the INSARAG Guidelines to the Secretariat (schmachtel@un.org) latest by 31 December 2015.*

Recommendation 1.5.: *It is recommended to create a glossary of technical USAR terms used in Spanish that can be added to the Guidelines indicating the equivalent terms from one country to another.*

2. Experience from recent emergencies in the region with activation of USAR teams

Chile and Guatemala presented the experiences they had in 2015 with the activation of their national USAR teams. Chile explained how the National Operations System - created after the experience of the earthquake of 2010 - was activated in the emergency caused by the severe weather conditions in the north of the country in March 2015 as well as in the emergency caused by the earthquake and tsunami of Illapel of 16 September 2015. Both experiences validated the National Operations System, the need to further strengthen the established protocols and the need for more nationally accredited USAR teams. Chile also spoke about the role that USAR teams have in body recovery, beyond the rescue work and that this cannot be ignored.

Guatemala presented the response to the emergency caused by the mudslide of 1 October 2015 in the village of El Cambaray II in the municipality of Santa Catarina Pinula, in which 37 people were rescued alive

and 280 people lost their lives (official data by the Government of Guatemala at the date of the meeting). Guatemala activated its response system to coordinate the work of search, identification, rescue and recovery of victims in the affected area. Although national response capacity in Guatemala was insufficient to meet the needs of the emergency, Guatemala obtained the support of a team from Mexico, led by the Directorate General of Civil Protection of Mexico. This cooperation was the result of direct coordination between the presidents of both countries. Guatemala also spoke of its experience with the "Topos" organization that offered support. As the support from the team was not accepted, a branch of the "Topos" spoke to the media mentioning that Guatemala made many mistakes in the response. This case caused a lot of "noise" in the media, although it is proven - even by Mexican authorities - that the "Topos" team does not enjoy any type of recognition. It is not accredited nor classified by any competent authority, and neither by INSARAG.

Comments made by members of the Regional Group congratulated Guatemala for the way in which it handled the emergency. Mexico in particular, having been in the response, congratulated Guatemala for the work done and ratified all the decisions made by the Guatemalan authorities in responding to the emergency. The case of the "Topos" demonstrated very directly and practically the need to have agreed standards for USAR teams in each country as well as an accreditation system for the teams, which should ensure, on the one hand, the quality of the response and, on the other hand, the respect for institutional protocols and coordination. The Chilean experience demonstrated the added value that such an accreditation system with its activation protocols provides for the national emergency response system.

Recommendation 2.1.: *Each country is recommended to adopt, and if necessary, adapt the INSARAG Guidelines to the needs of the country and establish an accreditation process for the teams.*

Recommendation 2.2.: *It is recommended that the Regional Group consider the drafting of a proposal to certify national USAR team accreditation processes.*

3. INSARAG Regional Exercise – SIMEX 2015 and National USAR Exercises – Exchange of Experience and Lessons Learned

Argentina gave a presentation on the simulation exercise organized in Mendoza, Argentina from 28 to 30 July 2015; a national exercise involving 29 national USAR teams. The exercise used a methodology similar to the INSARAG regional exercise - but at the national level. The exercise familiarized participants with the INSARAG methodology and provided an opportunity to incorporate procedures and mechanisms of the INSARAG methodology into the national plans.

Colombia presented the Urban Search and Rescue Field Exercise (SIBRU, Spanish acronym), which took place in Bogotá from 5 to 7 October 2015. The SIBRU was a full-scale field exercise with the participation of 19 national USAR teams and 9 entities of the national system. Rescue teams worked on 57 scenarios. Participants were also familiarized with the INSARAG Guidelines and particularly the OSOCC platform.

Chile presented the INSARAG Regional Exercise - SIMEX 2015, which took place from 22 to 26 September 2015 in Santiago, Chile with the participation of the entire national civil protection system of Chile, the National Operations System and the Health EOC, 17 international USAR teams, 8 national USAR teams, 7 international medical teams, two national medical equipment, an UNDAC team and its partners, as well as observers. In total, the exercise was attended by more than 270 participants from 16 countries and 6 regional and international organizations. Chile highlighted the benefit of the SIMEX preparation process for institutional strengthening and for the identification of gaps, as well as the need for an evaluation methodology that allows the development of an action plan after the exercise. In the case of Chile, an evaluation report of the exercise is being prepared to this effect. Chile also recommended to continue the organization of the Regional SIMEX in future, improving it based on the lessons from previous exercises and strengthening the learning and capacity development process.

The Secretariat presented the results of the evaluation done by participants through the evaluation survey. 140 responses were received from a total of over 270 participants, and a large majority of participants gave very good feedback on the exercise. Participants presented several recommendations on the methodology,

which will be reviewed and incorporated in the package as relevant.

Recommendation 3.1.: *Countries interested to organise a national simulation exercise, field exercise or regional simulation exercise (like the INSARAG SIMEX) are encouraged to take advantage of the experience of those countries that have already organised it. On the other hand, countries with experience in such exercises are encouraged to support interested countries in the planning and organisation of these exercises.*

Recommendation 3.2.: *It is recommended to incorporate the experience of the SIMEX in Chile into the methodology of the Regional exercise in view of continuing to strengthen the exercise material and process.*

4. Progress in Strengthening USAR Capacities at National and Regional Levels

Mexico presented their proposal for the creation of a national USAR team accreditation mechanism that was developed based on an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT). Mexico also presented an information management software designed for the accreditation process, which it offered to share with interested countries.

CEPREDENAC presented the progress in the implementation of the Central American Policy for Comprehensive Disaster Risk Management, with emphasis on regional mechanism for mutual assistance in case of disasters, the Central American Regional Academy for Search and Rescue, and the Central American Task Force (FTC by its Spanish acronym).

5. Proposals for Implementation of INSARAG Training in the Region

Chile presented the distant learning system and software that the fire academy in Chile uses to conduct training and ensure individual follow up to their students. The purpose of the presentation was to show an example of how one could consider to disseminate and train on the INSARAG Guidelines remotely, considering that this would require time and resources for the design, management and monitoring of the training.

CEPREDENAC presented the Central American Regional Academy for Search and Rescue whose vision is to be an educational institution in search and rescue, with the aim to "strengthen personal skills of the members of the first response teams and thereby contribute to the consolidation of institutions which make up the national emergency systems to respond efficiently and effectively to the impact generated by an emergency or disaster". The Regional Academy is an example of an institution that incorporated into its curriculum the training on the INSARAG Guidelines.

These presentations served as inputs for the following discussion on the evaluation of the regional strategy and priorities for 2016.

6. Evaluation of the Regional Strategy and Priorities for 2016, in line with Results of the Global Meeting

For this session, participants were divided into two groups (a Spanish-speaking group and an English-speaking group) in order to discuss and obtain input on the following three questions:

- i. Taking into account the newly adopted INSARAG Abu Dhabi Declaration, does the Regional Group consider that adjustments have to be made to the INSARAG Strategy 2014-2017 in order for it to cover the period 2015-2020?
- ii. Based on the progress in implementing the Regional Group work plan of 2015, what

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contributions / suggestions can you propose for 2016?

- iii. What are the commitments by each and every one to contribute to the implementation of the work plan in 2016?

At the end of the session, the new INSARAG Global Chair, Ambassador Manuel Bessler and the INSARAG Secretary, Mr. Jesper Lund from OCHA participated in the discussion. Both congratulated the Regional Group for the significant progress that has occurred in recent years at regional level and encouraged the Regional Group to provide suggestions on how the work with national teams and with national accreditation processes can be improved. They also encouraged the region to consider the classification of their teams as international USAR teams through the IEC process, without however seeing the classification as an end in itself. And finally, they asked members of the Regional Group to think pragmatically and use established procedures and platforms for coordination when it is required in times of emergency. With the existing risks/hazards in the region, the Regional Group should prepare itself for a major emergency that can happen at any time.

Review of the INSARAG Strategy 2014-2017

- The groups both coincided in considering that the two goals of the INSARAG strategy remain important for the next period 2015-2020. There were no specific comments on the objectives beyond the need to update some references (e.g. objective 1.1. make reference to Manual A of Vol II for example)

Contributions / suggestions for the regional work plan for 2016

- Building national capacity should be a major concern in the region, and it is required to go beyond the current status with the development of a technical guide on the national accreditation process. The region should propose an external peer review process of the national accreditation processes. It is important to consider that the validation of the process has both political and technical components.
- It is important to have an updated directory of national teams in the region (be they accredited/certified or not) in addition to the international teams directory. This directory would be a list of “trustworthy” resources that are available in the region even though they are not formally classified by the IEC process.
- It is suggested to have a roster of resources / experts / advisors available at the regional level on issues of relevance to INSARAG. It is suggested that this roster be coordinated by FCSS / INSARAG Secretariat.
- It is important to promote the dissemination of guidelines and methodologies, above all the INSARAG Guidelines, but also the OSOCC Guidelines, UNDAC Handbook, etc. The use of webexes for the dissemination should be promoted.
- It is important to promote ownership of Vol. I of the INSARAG Guidelines at the political level and with decision makers (at the political, military and diplomatic level).
- It is suggested to design a specific course on the INSARAG Guidelines. In addition, work should be done to harmonize the USAR training curricula based on the INSARAG Guidelines.
- It is important to strengthen the already existing regional integration processes.
- It is suggested to improve the coordination of activities at the regional level to avoid duplication and overlap of activities on the same dates.
- It is important to continue strengthening the governance and functioning of the Regional Group in view of improving the legitimacy of the Regional Group in its area of work.

Compromisos

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- Chile informed about its commitment to continue to work closely with the Regional Chairmanship group and the Secretariat beyond 2015 when it will hand over the Chairmanship to Colombia. In addition, the Firefighters of Chile offered concrete support in the person of Sebastian Mocarquer for INSARAG activities.
- Ecuador informed of its interest to consider the organisation of the Regional Exercise – SIMEX in 2017.
- Colombia, in its capacity of next Regional Chair, informed about the creation of a dedicated team of three persons to work in the Unidad Nacional de Gestión del Riesgo de Desastres (UNGRD) on INSARAG. In addition, it offered the installations of the training centre in Taccurrumbi in the coffee zone in Colombia to host a workshop on the proposal for the certification of national accreditation processes. Colombia also expressed its commitment to organise the INSARAG Regional exercise – SIMEX 2016 in Colombia. And lastly, Colombia informed that it will print 3000 copies of the INSARAG Guidelines, which will be shared with the Regional Group.

Recommendation 6.1.: *The Chairmanship group is requested to take into account the contributions to the regional work plan as well as the commitments in order to elaborate an updated work plan for 2016.*

7. Designation of the Regional Chairmanship Group for 2016

Based on the agreement reached last year, through which Ecuador joined the Regional Chairmanship group in 2015 taking on the function of II Vice-chair and El Salvador would form part in 2016, as well as the reconfirmation of the commitment by El Salvador to take on this responsibility, El Salvador was formally designated as II Vice-chair of the Regional Group for 2016.

In accordance with the rotation principle, Chile will leave its function of Regional Chair, which will be taken on by Colombia as of January 2016, and Ecuador will take on the I Vice-chair.

OCHA/ INSARAG Secretariat formally thanked Chile for its leadership shown throughout the year and above all for the example it has given to the region and the INSARAG community worldwide in the implementation of the INSARAG guidelines at the national level and in the strengthening of its national USAR system and process. OCHA encouraged Chile to continue to be actively involved in the work of the INSARAG network.

Recommendation 7.1.: Countries interested to form part of the Regional Chairmanship Group are encouraged to carry out the required consultations internally in their countries in order to be able to formalise their commitment when the Secretariat will launch the process mid 2016 for the 2017 Regional Chairmanship group.

8. Announcements of International/Regional Events

- Mexico informed about the II National Civil Protection Convention which will be held from 11 to 13 November 2015 and to which members of the Regional Group are invited to participate if interested.
- Peru informed about the holding of a USAR training course in December in the border zone between Ecuador and Peru. The course is organised by the Peru-Ecuador Binational Committee and is open to participants from both countries.
- Honduras informed on the FAHUM simulation exercise to be held in Honduras in April 2016 and in which it is expected to count on the participation of an UNDAC team, to use the OSOCC platform and possibly to count on the participation of other response teams, to be confirmed.
- OCHA/ INSARAG Secretariat informed on the Humanitarian Network and Partnership Week to be held from 1-4 February 2016 (www.hnpw.org). The INSARAG Steering Group meeting and the UNDAC Advisory Board meeting form part of this week.

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9. Acknowledgments

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in its capacity as INSARAG Secretariat and all participants to this meeting would like to thank the Government of UAE for having organized this meeting.

Annex A – Final agenda of the meeting

9:00-9:15	Opening <i>Regional Chair, OCHA Regional Office, Secretariat</i>
9:15-9:45	Introduction of Participants and Adoption of the Agenda <i>Secretariat</i>
9:45-10:00	Group photo <i>Host country</i>
10:00-10:30	Tea/ Coffee Break
10:30-11:00	INSARAG in the Region – Action Points from 2014 & Activities of 2015 <i>Regional Chair</i>
11:00-11:45	Experience from recent emergencies in the region with activation of USAR teams <i>Chile, Guatemala</i>
11:45-12:45	INSARAG Regional Exercise – SIMEX 2015 and National USAR Exercises – Exchange of Experience and Lessons Learned <i>Chile, Secretariat, Argentina, Colombia</i>
12:45-14:00	Lunch
14:00-14:45	Progress in Strengthening USAR Capacities at National and Regional Levels <i>Mexico, CEPREDENAC</i>
14:45-15:15	Proposals for Implementation of INSARAG Training in the Region <i>Chile, CEPREDENAC</i>
15:15-15:45	Tea/ Coffee Break
15:45-16:45	Evaluation of the Regional Strategy and Priorities for 2016, in line with Results of the Global Meeting <i>Regional Chairmanship Group & Secretariat</i>
16:45-17:00	Main Action Points from the Meeting <i>Regional Chairmanship Group & Secretariat</i>
17:00-17:15	Announcements of International/Regional Events <i>Secretariat</i>
17:15-17:30	Designation of the Regional Chairmanship Group for 2016 <i>Secretariat</i>
17:30-17:45	Closing Statements <i>Regional Chairmanship group</i>

End of INSARAG Americas Regional Meeting

Annex B – List of participants

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XIV Annual Meeting of the INSARAG Americas Regional Group

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