

# XV annual meeting of the INSARAG Americas Regional Group

Chairman summary

Bogota, Colombia, 16-17 November 2016



INSARAG Secretariat  
Field Coordination Support Section  
Emergency Services Branch

The XV meeting of the INSARAG Americas Regional Group was held on 16-17 November 2016 in Bogota, Colombia. It was hosted by the Government of Colombia in its capacity as Regional Chair and prepared jointly with the I and II Vice-chair, Ecuador and El Salvador 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 Dr. Carlos Iván Márquez Pérez, Director of the National Disaster Risk Management Unit, Colombia as INSARAG Americas Regional Chair. Mr Dario Alvarez, Regional Advisor of the OCHA Regional Office in Panama and Mr. Christophe Schmachtel of the INSARAG Secretariat/ FCSS, OCHA Geneva also gave opening speeches.

The meeting gathered a total of 56 participants from 14 countries of the region, 1 regional organization (CEPREDENAC), 2 countries from other regions, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO) 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, as well as with some UNDAC members and UNDAC focal points.

The III Regional UNDAC consultation meeting took place immediately after the Regional Group meeting. The summary of the UNDAC meeting is available separately with OCHA.

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).

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## 1. Experience and lessons learnt on the Ecuador earthquake, 16 April 2016

The session, which was facilitated by the Regional Chair, included a series of presentations on the experience and lessons learnt in the response to the earthquake of 16 April 2016 in Ecuador. The first presentation was done by the Government of Ecuador, through the INSARAG focal point, then a member of the UNDAC team that deployed to Ecuador, followed by PAHO on the experience of the response by Emergency Medical Teams (EMTs) and lastly by the INSARAG Secretariat/ OCHA. Following this, the floor was opened also to each of the countries who deployed a USAR team so that they briefly present on their deployment answering the following questions:

- When did you team arrive and with what capacity?
- What should you/ your team do differently in the future in order to improve the implementation of the INSARAG Guidelines and the efficiency of USAR operations?

The focal points from the following countries presented their experience and recommendations: Colombia, Chile, México, Honduras, Dominican Republic, Peru, Cuba, and Panama. The focal points stressed the political pressure under which they are working and which resulted in some cases in late deployments, without the capacity required for an international deployment.

The experience of the response to the earthquake has above all provided evidence for the need to have standardized capacities both of USAR teams at national and at international level, as well the mechanisms, procedures and protocols for activation and coordination of the response, which cover all key entities, including the response teams themselves, the emergency management structures, also at highest political level, and the diplomatic component.

This emergency showed one more time that the local and national capacities are the most efficient and rapid for saving lives and underscored the need for the INSARAG community to support even more the strengthening of national capacities based on the INSARAG methodology. Even if there were still too many international teams that arrived without the required capacity, without the due knowledge of the INSARAG methodology and the required self-sufficiency, a great progress was observed, which is thanks to the work in the past few years, with several teams showing the needed capacity and the commitment to support the response in an efficient and coordinated manner.

The response of the Emergency Medical teams witnessed the first ever implementation of the EMT Coordination Cell concept in the region, known as CICOM in the Americas (Medical Information and Coordination Cell). It was led by the Ministry of Public Health of Ecuador and supported by PAHO. The experience highlighted the concept of having only one response, without difference between the national and international responsibility and the notion of co-responsibility between the national authorities of the affected country, leading the response, and the response teams.

The general conclusions of the discussion can be found in annex B of the present summary.

***Recommendation 1.1.:*** *The Regional Group shall strongly encourage the proposal to support countries in the establishment of their national USAR team accreditation processes, and that this process includes the quality standards for the USAR teams as much as the requirements on the national system to have the required processes, procedures and protocols for the activation and coordination of the response.*

***Recommendation 1.2.:*** *The Regional Group and particularly the INSARAG policy focal points shall insist with their national authorities on the need to have well prepared teams, trained in the INSARAG methodology and self-sufficient before offering them for international deployment.*

***Recommendation 1.3.:*** *The Regional Group shall continue and strengthen its collaboration with PAHO and the EMT initiative with the aim of promoting an efficient collaboration between the USAR and the medical response. The collaboration and coordination between the CICOM (EMTCC), the UCC, the governmental lead agencies and the OSOCC, in case is it established, shall be further strengthened.*

## 2. INSARAG in the Americas – Action points from 2015 and activities 2016

The Regional Chair recalled the regional work plan for 2016 which was worked out on the basis of the contributions received the previous year. He informed that progress or full implementation was achieved with most of the proposed objectives and activities for the year, achieving important steps towards the strengthening of the region in the area of search and rescue; however, some pending challenges remained for 2017, due to various factors including time. They are summarized below:

- Strengthen the capacities of the countries in the knowledge and use of the INSARAG Guidelines
- Finalise the systematization of the information on the regional assessment of national USAR team capacities with inputs from all the countries, and draft the final report and disseminate it
- Present the proposal on the external support and recognition process for national USAR team accreditation processes to the INSARAG Steering Group in February 2017

- Continue to promote the systematization and exchange of good practices in the region
- With the lessons learnt of the SIMEX 2016 and the previous ones, support future host countries in the organisation of the regional exercises
- Motivate countries in the region to initiate the INSARAG External Classification process for their teams
- Approve and disseminate the instruction for INSARAG focal points as an important tool of all countries in the region
- Maintain the coordination amongst the Regional Chairmanship Group and strengthen the communication scheme amongst the Chairmanship group and the countries of the region

**Recommendation 2.1.:** The Regional Chairmanship Group for 2017 shall consider the challenges and pending tasks with the aim of ensuring continuity to the work in the region. Colombia offered the continuity of its support to several of the key activities, such as the finalization of the regional assessment of national USAR capacities and the proposal on the national accreditation processes.

### 3. Regional exercise – SIMEX 2016

Colombia presented the results and scope of the regional SIMEX which took place in Bogotá from 26 to 30 September 2016 with a total of 748 participants from 25 countries, of which 420 were participants in the simulation, in addition to 146 observers, 57 members of the exercise control group and 125 members of the exercise support and coordination team.

The exercise allowed for the activation and putting to test of the national disaster management instruments and procedures, and it provided the opportunity also to establish an activation protocol with the private sector. New technologies were used in the situation rooms, which augmented the learning experience of participants. The international response tools and mechanisms such as the Virtual OSOCC; the RDC, the OSOCC and others, were activated and established; and the exercise underlined the need to continue training all teams and staff on the methodologies. Concepts such as the RDC should be included in the national plans and capacities. All teams have shown a great willingness to work together and exchange experiences.

PAHO presented the specific objectives and results of the participation of the health sector and the Emergency Medical Teams in the SIMEX, for whom this presents a great opportunity to insert themselves into the realm of a larger simulation.

The Secretariat presented the results of the evaluation of the exercise done by participants by answering a survey, which was shared with them after the SIMEX by email, with a specific time to respond. In this case, only 14,97% of the total number of participants responded to the survey. (The importance of this number can be played down a bit however when taking out the control group and the coordination team of the exercise who were not asked to fill out the survey.) Overall, the evaluation is very positive with 94% of the responses indicating that “taking the full event into consideration” they rate it as “excellent” or “good”. 99% of the respondents would recommend to any colleague the participation in the event. The detailed contribution on the methodology of the SIMEX can be found in the presentation and will be taken into consideration for the next organization of the SIMEX.

In the ensuing discussion, the concern was expressed on the very low level of responses received to the questionnaire and it was recommended to try one more time to obtain more responses, and to differentiate between the comments received from each functional group.

**Recommendation 3.1.:** *It is recommended to send the evaluation survey one more time to the SIMEX participants with the aim of obtaining a more representative picture and analyse the responses in a disaggregated manner by functional groups.*

### 4. Role of focal points

On the basis of the draft instruction for focal points, elaborated by the Regional Chair, and the terms of reference for focal points as they currently stand in the INSARAG Guidelines, the Secretariat presented a summary of the expectations on focal points, identifying five objectives divided into emergency preparedness and response work respectively.

- Preparedness: Promote and facilitate the implementation of the INSARAG Guidelines and methodology within his/her country
- Preparedness Prepare its “international” USAR teams in line with the INSARAG Guidelines and methodology
- Preparedness Familiarize with and contribute to the continued development of policies and the methodology

- Response: Lead the implementation of INSARAG Guidelines and methodology in his/her own country
- Response: Ensure the implementation of the INSARAG Guidelines by its “international” USAR teams in an international response

The Secretariat then facilitated an exercise with the purpose to exchange experiences amongst participants of the Regional Group on the activities that each one carries out to achieve the five main mentioned objectives.

The report from the discussion groups can be found in the annex.

***Recommendation 5.1.:*** *The Regional Chairmanship Group is requested to consolidate the contributions into an operational guide for focal points.*

## **5. Proposal for an external support and recognition process of national USAR team accreditation processes**

On behalf of the Regional Working Group, Mr. William Tovar of Colombia presented the revised proposal on the INSARAG external support and recognition process of national USAR accreditation processes. This proposal has taken into consideration comments received from the Regional Groups in Africa-Europe-Middle East and Asia-Pacific as well as from the INSARAG Team Leaders meeting, and a series of individual comments. The working group met on 15 November to review and adapt the proposal.

Specific emphasis was made on the main objective of the proposal being to provide a general framework for providing advice and strengthening national USAR capacities based on the INSARAG Guidelines. Given the sensitivities, the initial possibility for national USAR teams to obtain a patch containing the INSARAG logo was eliminated from the proposal and it is also not presented as a validation process. However, the proposal continues to include on the one hand a support mechanism and on the other hand a recognition by INSARAG of the national USAR team accreditation processes. The discussion was focused on the following questions:

- i. *Does your country have experts that could be part of the proposed regional roster that would form the "Technical Support Team"? Would your country support the participation of these experts in the Technical Support Team to support the process in other countries?*
  - Overall, countries confirmed that they have the experts and that they are in favor of putting them at the disposal of the Regional Group to participate in the Technical Support Team.
  - It is necessary for the profile to be well defined, and that the capacity and selection criteria of the Technical Support Team be verified.
  - There is a clear willingness to support this process as countries consider it very useful to have the recourse of a technical team at regional level which can support national USAR systems with an external vision and contribution.
  - The main purpose of the team is to help and advise countries in the establishment of their national USAR team accreditation process, based on the INSARAG methodology as minimum standards, but that should always leave all the required flexibility for countries to adapt their national system to the realities of their own country.
- ii. *How to you think the costs of the "Technical Support Team" should be covered?*
  - The general principle shall be that the requesting country covers the cost related to the Technical Support Team but there may well be different modalities to reach this, including bilateral agreements and support from donors.
  - It was stressed that this principle is important jointly with the proof by the country that the process is included in the public budget as this is evidence for a real commitment from the requesting country.
- iii. *Do you think that a visit to the requesting country by the "Technical Support Team" with the purpose of confirming the achievement of criteria and standards of the national accreditation process is necessary?*
  - In general, at least one visit to the country by the Technical Support Team was considered necessary.
  - However, the opinion was raised that this step should not be considered absolutely necessary, as there can be other forms to carry it out, such as through videoconferences, work from distance and electronic communication.
  - It was clarified however that the verification should, in some form or another, be considered obligatory even if it is not carried out through a visit to the country.

- iv. *Do you think that the process should culminate in a kind of recognition by INSARAG of the country's accreditation process? , if so, how would it look like?*
- Overall, the opinion with regard to the need for a recognition by INSARAG was positive; however, there were doubts by some countries on the authority/ ability of INSARAG to award a recognition to a country. It was suggested that the region present the proposal to the Steering Group with the aim to get clarify on the ability to award a recognition to national processes.
  - It was clarified that it is not about the recognition of national USAR teams but of the national emergency management systems which are in charge of implementing the national USAR accreditation process.
  - The suggested recognition would be of administrative nature from the INSARAG Secretariat to the national authorities of the country, possibly a certificate or a letter from the Secretariat.

***Recommendation 5.1.:*** *The Regional Group recommends the working group on the national accreditation process to take into account the contributions to the proposal and revise the proposal accordingly before presenting it to the Steering Group in 2017. Additionally, it is suggested to take into consideration very specifically the standards proposed for light teams as well as recommendation 6.2.*

## **6. Proposal of the Light Team Working Group**

The Chair of the Light Team Working Group, Mr. Arjan Stam from the Netherlands, presented the proposal on the concept of international light teams. It was important to clarify that the Steering Group had requested the Working Group to elaborate a proposal on the international character of light teams, and how light teams can be inserted into the international response framework of INSARAG. Mr. Stam clarified that the intention of the proposal is to “complete” the INSARAG system which until now defines the standards and place of medium and heavy teams at international level, but does not include light teams in the category of “international”.

There was a lot of interest in the proposal and substantive discussions on the scope and validity of the proposal. The opinions expressed by the Regional Group are as follows:

- Everybody was in agreement with the fact that light teams need standards and that it is a very valid proposal to include them more explicitly into the INSARAG Guidelines and methodology.
- However, it was mentioned that these standards should be the same for national and international light teams.
- The main purpose of light teams should be above all to serve the local and national response, although it was recognized that in some cases there may be a need and added value in the international response, mainly within the respective region, and to neighbouring countries. This is why standards should be agreed to at the level of INSARAG.
- It is recommended that the quality control of the capacities of light teams be done at the national level, as part of the national accreditation processes, and that this shall not form part of the INSARAG external classification process.
- An international recognition of light teams is not deemed necessary nor appropriate.
- The international classification (of medium and heavy teams) should be complementary to the national accreditation, which should cover light, medium and heavy teams at national level.
- There was a lot of discussion on the interrelationship and the complementarity of the proposal on the national accreditation processes and the proposal on the light teams; and it is recommended that the two themes be unified as one. This would strengthen the national accreditation process by a clarification of the standards for light teams and the INSARAG recognition would be awarded – if not to the individual teams – but to the national processes.

***Recommendation 6.1.:*** *The Regional Group recommends the Light Team Working Group to take into consideration the contributions of the Regional Group in its upcoming revision of the proposal before presenting it to the Steering Group in 2017.*

***Recommendation 6.2.:*** *The Regional Group recommends the Steering Group to consider unifying the themes on the national USAR team accreditation processes and the proposal on the standards for light teams.*

## **7. INSARAG global updates and updates of Working Groups**

The Secretariat presented the summary of global activities and insisted on some of the topics of specific interest such as the issue of “Beyond the Rubble” and the process for the INSARAG External Reclassifications. The document on the new guidance for the external reclassification process was shared with the Regional Group prior to the meeting.

The Chair of the INSARAG Training Working Group, Mr. Dewey Perks from the USA, presented the progress achieved throughout the year, putting emphasis on the USAR Coordination Cell (UCC) Course which was designed as a training of trainers' course. For the first course in the region, participation will be limited to countries with classified USAR teams and those in process of being classified. He also clarified that the course concept is based on a commitment by the countries to make available the trained staff for emergencies, independently of the deployment or not of their own USAR team. The region will need to elaborate a training plan once the first course is done. Mr Perks also asked the region to share their experience with the regional SIMEX with the Training Working Group so that it can be incorporated into the SIMEX package.

The Secretariat then presented the progress of work by the Medical Working Group (MWG), which focused on the collaboration with the EMT initiative and on clarifying the relationship between the medical component of a USAR team and the EMTs. The MWG suggests to continue with this focus in addition to elaborate guidance notes on i) medical logistical considerations for USAR teams and ii) health considerations for USAR teams in the base of operations.

The Secretariat also presented the mandate of the Transitional Guideline Review Group, in which Mr Sebastián Mocarquer from Chile represents the region. This working group has the function to provide guidance on the implementation of the current Guidelines and to identify, collect and analyse topics for their inclusion in the next revision of the INSARAG Guidelines planned for 2020.

***Recommendation 7.1.:*** *Members of the Regional Group are encouraged to provide their contributions on the topic of "Beyond the Rubble" to Mr. David Sochor ([David.sochor@eda.admin.ch](mailto:David.sochor@eda.admin.ch)) of Switzerland who works on the concept note with the DACHL group, a sub-group of the AEME Regional Group composed of Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Luxembourg; and maintain the Secretariat informed ([insarag@un.org](mailto:insarag@un.org)). General questions are: i) What is your understanding of "Beyond the Rubble"?, ii) Do you see the need to engage USAR teams in this area of activity?, iii) What are possible limitations for this engagement?, iv) Where does it make sense?*

***Recommendation 7.2.:*** *Host countries for the regional SIMEX are encouraged to share the reports with the Training Working Group and the Secretariat so that these can be taken into consideration for the continuing update of the methodology.*

***Recommendation 7.3.:*** *Members of the Regional Group are requested to use the communication channel of the Transitional GRG to provide contributions to the next revision of the INSARAG Guidelines.*

## **8. Regional assessment of national USAR team capacities**

Colombia presented the progress on the regional assessment of national USAR team capacities which was requested by the Regional Group last year. In this version, the questions had been separated between those targeted at policy focal points and those targeted at operational focal points on the capacities of USAR teams. There are less than 50% of responses so far.

The discussion focused on the interest to continue (or not) with this project and it was agreed that the need still remains. It was further clarified that the purpose of the assessment is twofold: it should firstly serve focal points as a tool to assess the state of the national USAR capacities in their own country; and secondly, it should respond to the need to have a regional picture of these capacities. It is also expected to update the INSARAG directory with the information that countries provide on their national USAR teams.

Colombia offered to continue its support for the implementation of the regional assessment. A suggestion was made to design an online tracking tool which would be open and public. This way everyone would be informed on the status of progress of the assessment.

***Recommendation 8.1.:*** *The Regional Group recommended to continue with the assessment with the aim to obtain a regional picture and a regional analysis report. The deadline for countries to submit their information was extended to 31 March 2017. The focal point remains Mr. William Tovar, of Colombia ([william.tovar@gestiondelriesgo.gov.co](mailto:william.tovar@gestiondelriesgo.gov.co), +573108777025), and it is kindly requested to copy the Secretariat for follow up purposes with the regional chairmanship group. The Regional Chair was also requested to issue a communication to the region explaining one more time the purpose of the assessment.*

## **9. INSARAG Strategy 2017-2020 and contributions to the regional work plan 2017**

Participants were separated into three groups and discussed their contributions to the draft INSARAG strategy 2017-2020 as well as to the regional work plan 2017. Comments and contributions are listed below for the Steering Group and the Regional Chairmanship group, respectively, to take them into consideration.

## i. Contributions to the INSARAG Strategy 2017-2020

Several comments were directly made on the draft strategy 2017-2020, which can be found in annex C. Comments are overall self-explanatory, only to add that the on objective 2.5 it was felt that the European Union should not be singled out as it is specific to one region, and it is suggested to refer more broadly to “other international and regional organisations”.

## ii. Contributions to the regional work plan 2017

As regards the contributions to the regional work plan, participants reviewed the objectives of this year’s work plan, proposed activities and, in some cases, offered commitments for their implementation. Some contributions were done directly on the document of the regional work plan 2016 and are with the Secretariat. Overall, the opinion was that the objectives should be maintained and the activities updated.

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Commitments</b>
Strengthen resilience	Training, organisation, and improvement at community level	Road map for local Governments, White Helmets
Provide information to response entities	Develop a methodology and guidelines for information dissemination	
Establish the capacity strengthening process as national priority	Coordinate efforts by NGOs and donors	
Promote training events	Training, SIMEX, conferences, including at binational level	
Training for decision makers at policy level	Develop a workshop type training	
Generate a regional training plan, based on the needs, and enlarge the pool of trainers	Courses: RDC, OSOCC, UCC	
Objective 1.2. to be maintained: Improve the knowledge of the capacities and the requirements of the national disaster managements systems in the area of USAR in the region	Follow up to the regional assessment of national USAR team capacities	Countries will respond to the questionnaire
Objective 1.3. to be maintained Promote and strengthen the national USAR team accreditation processes and promote a better recognition of national USAR teams within the INSARAG network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Obtain approval of the process</li> <li>Promote its adoption</li> <li>Promote the dissemination of the process</li> <li>Include high level authorities.</li> </ul>	
Objective 1.4. to be maintained Foster exchange of experiences in areas of common interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued exchange, including through the use of the @INSARAG twitter account and it is suggested to continue with the bulletins.</li> <li>Use virtual platforms such as webex</li> </ul>	
Objective 1.5. to be maintained Support interested, disaster/EQ prone countries to strengthen their capacities to receive regional/ international cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop minimum standards on what a SIMEX should look like”</li> <li>Develop a standard and detailed timeline for LEMA</li> <li>Strengthen capacities of the excon on how to manage the timelines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cuba informed of its interest to host the SIMEX in 2017, however, requested an extension of the deadline to confirm this until the end of the year, informing</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote implementation of simulations at national level</li> <li>Review the regional consensus on cost covering so as to facilitate the holding of the exercise by countries who do not have the financial capacity to cover all costs.</li> <li>Define funding mechanisms</li> <li>Institutionalize the regional support group to countries wishing to organize the SIMEX</li> <li>Identify countries at risk which would benefit from the organization of the exercise</li> </ul>	<p>that Hurricane Matthew has delayed the planning process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Argentina informed of its interested to organize the regional SIMEX in 2018</li> </ul>
Objective 2.1. to be maintained Provide recommendations to teams that have the backup and mandate to deploy internationally to pass the INSARAG External classification..		
Objective 2..2 to be maintained Promote a structured response to emergencies by countries in accordance with the INSARAG Guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use of the VOSOCC</li> <li>Clarify use of the INSARAG directory</li> <li>Finalize the operational guide for focal points</li> <li>A regional workshop for focal points is recommended</li> </ul>	
Objective 2..4 to be maintained: Promote training on the coordination methodology, including the OSOCC and UCC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A shortened version of the OSOCC course is suggested for the high-level political decision makers.</li> </ul>	
Goal 3 to be maintained: Improve the management and the leadership of the Regional Group		

**Recommendation 9.1.:** The Regional Chairmanship Group is requested to take into consideration the contributions into the elaboration of the work plan for 2017 and the Steering Group to take into consideration the contributions to the INSARAG Strategy 2017-2020.

**Recommendation 9.2.:** Countries of the Regional Group are requested to confirm their contributions to the proposed/ requested activities to the Regional Chairmanship group and the Secretariat ([schmachtel@un.org](mailto:schmachtel@un.org), [insarag@un.org](mailto:insarag@un.org)).

## 10. Announcement of international events

### i. Global platform for disaster risk reduction

Mexico presented the Global platform for disaster risk reduction which will take place from 22-26 May 2017. It will be the first time that it takes place outside Geneva, Switzerland. Mexico also underlined that it will provide the first opportunity for the international community to review the global progress of the implementation of the Sendai Framework.

### ii. Humanitarian Network and Partnership week (HNPW)

The Secretariat/ OCHA presented the Humanitarian Network and Partnership week (HNPW) which will take place from 6-10 February 2017 in Geneva, Switzerland. The HNPW provides the opportunity to all response and preparedness networks, such as INSARAG, UNDAC, EMT, CmCoord and others to meet in a forum. The motto of this coming version is "as local as possible, as international as necessary".

OCHA informed that even if some sessions will be closed only to the respective members, all members of the Americas Regional Group are invited to participate. And if they require personalized invitations, they should contact OCHA/FCSS – INSARAG Secretariat at ([perez1@un.org](mailto:perez1@un.org), [schmachtel@un.org](mailto:schmachtel@un.org), [insarag@un.org](mailto:insarag@un.org)). Registration can be done on the website: [www.hnpw.org](http://www.hnpw.org).

## 11. Designation of the Regional Chairmanship Group for 2017

The Secretariat informed the Regional Group that El Salvador had taken the decision to resign from its role in the Regional Chairmanship group due to economic reasons, yet maintaining all its commitment towards INSARAG and towards the strengthening of its USAR capacities.

The Secretariat also informed that only one candidature was received for the function of II Vice-chair, which came from Mexico. Given the situation explained above, the Secretariat had consulted with Mexico on its willingness to accept a designation directly as I Vice-chair of the INSARAG Regional Group. The Mexican authorities had replied positively.

With the aim of not leaving the Regional Chairmanship incomplete for 2017, the Secretariat asked members of the Regional Group to consider their interest in taking on the function of II Vice-chair, recalling that the expression of interest represents a commitment for three years, culminating in the function of Regional Chair in the third year.

Argentina confirmed its interest to taken on the function and informed that it will formalize it through a communication to the Secretariat.

Based on the above, the following designation of the Regional Chairmanship was done:

- The Regional Group confirmed the designation of Ecuador, represented by Myr. (B) Jorge Martínez, Undersecretary for preparedness and response of the Risk Management Secretariat as Regional Chair for 2017
- The Regional Group designated Mexico, represented by Lic. Ricardo de la Cruz Musalem, General Director for Civil Protection as I Vice-chair for 2017.

***Recommendation 11.1.:*** Countries interested to take on the function of II Vice-chair for 2017 are requested to confirm this interest through a formal communication to the Secretariat ([insarag@un.org](mailto:insarag@un.org), [schmachtel@un.org](mailto:schmachtel@un.org)),, latest by 1 December 2016.

## 12. Acknowledgements

The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in its capacity as INSARAG Secretariat and on behalf of all participants in this meeting and the members of the Regional Group would like to thank the Government of Colombia for the excellent organisation of this meeting and for the determined leadership of the Regional Group throughout the whole year.

**Annex A: Final agenda of the meeting**

**XV annual Meeting of the INSARAG Americas Regional Group  
16-17 November 2016  
Bogotá, Colombia**

## Agenda

### Wednesday, 16 November – INSARAG Regional Group

Time	Session
0800 - 0845	<b>Registration of participants</b> Government of Colombia
0900 – 0930	<b>Opening</b> Colombia – INSARAG Secretariat
0930 – 1000	<b>Introduction of participants and adoption of agenda</b> INSARAG Secretariat
1000 – 1030	<b>Group photo and break</b> Government of Colombia
1030-1230	<b>Experience and lessons learnt from Ecuador</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Context and national response</li> <li>• National and international USAR response</li> <li>• National and international EMT response</li> <li>• UNDAC response</li> </ul>
1230 – 1400	<b>Lunch</b>
1400 – 1445	<b>INSARAG in the Americas</b> <b>Action points from 2015 and activities in 2016</b> Regional Chair
1445 – 1600	<b>Regional Exercise – SIMEX 2016</b> Colombia, INSARAG Secretariat and PAHO
1600 – 1630	<b>Coffee break</b>
1630 – 1800	<b>Role of focal points</b> Secretariat
1830	<b>Official dinner</b>

## Thursday, 17 November – INSARAG Regional Group

Time	Session
0800 – 0900	<b>Presentation of discussion topics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External support and validation process of national USAR team accreditation processes</li> <li>• Progress of Light Teams Working Group</li> </ul>
0900 – 0945	<b>Group discussion</b> Rotation 1
0945 – 1030	<b>Group discussion</b> Rotation 2
1030 – 1100	<b>Coffee break</b>
1100 – 1145	<b>Report back from group discussions</b>
1145 – 1230	<b>INSARAG topics</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update on global activities</li> <li>• IER proposal</li> <li>• Working Group updates</li> </ul>
1230 – 1400	<b>Lunch</b>
1400 – 1430	<b>Projects of the Regional group:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional assessment of national USAR team capacity</li> </ul>
1430 – 1445	<b>INSARAG 2017-2020 strategy and contributions to the regional work plan in 2017</b>
1445 – 1545	<b>Group discussions</b>
1545 – 1600	<b>Coffee break</b>
1600 – 1630	<b>Report back from group discussions</b>
1630 – 1700	<b>Announcement of international events</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Global platform on Disaster Risk Reduction, Mexico, 22-26.05.2017 (Mexico)</li> <li>• Humanitarian Network and Partnership Week (HNPW), Geneva, Switzerland, 6-10.02.2017</li> </ul>
1700 – 1715	<b>Confirmation of Regional Chair for 2017 and designation of I Vice-chair for 2017</b>
1715 – 1730	<b>Closure</b>

## Annex B: General conclusions of the discussions on the Ecuador earthquake

1. **The Ecuador earthquake of 16 April 2016 provided evidence for the challenges that we have in front of us in the field of search and rescue at regional and global level.** The numbers: 671 fatalities, 113 live rescues, 1472 members of national rescue teams, 925 international rescue workers from 15 countries, show us that as INSARAG network we need to continue working relentlessly to promote technical, operational and tactical capacities as well as policies on search and rescue in order to ensure life-saving in these types of events.
2. **Local capacities are the most effective, appropriate and rapid resources.** However, evidence on the lack of standard procedures in search and rescue by national teams in Ecuador reiterates the importance of elaborating capacity strengthening processes internally within the countries, reflected in national accreditation processes supported by INSARAG; and for this reason, as Region, we need to continue to promote the proposal which we are strengthening to that it is approved as a whole by the INSARAG network.
3. **The coordination between the different sectors in an emergency of this magnitude continues to be a challenge.** The USAR coordination needs to be represented in the emergency coordination centers with the aim to ensure the flow of operations, as well as the information flow between the risk management governing bodies at national level and the foreign Ministries, so as to allow for a clear, timely and unified message to be given to the international community.

It is also necessary for international teams to strengthen their coordination with the national authorities, always starting already from before the actual departure from the home countries until the sending of the end of mission report. A good practice in this emergency was the establishment of the USAR Coordination Cell (UCC) and the EMTCC (CICOM).

4. Although we see an increase in the number of **professional USAR teams at the regional level, complying with the standards and procedures of the INSARAG Guidelines** and using the same technical and operational language, which facilitated the work to the benefit of the communities and the integration of the teams, it is still necessary to strengthen and disseminate the minimum requirements on entry, equipment, autonomy, appropriateness, so that the teams do not become a burden on the country. This way, we will avoid “many specialists in search and rescue with little search and little rescue”.
5. **Receiving countries and their emergency management governing bodies (risk management, health ministries, etc.) need to be clear** on guidelines, procedures, and internal requirements for requests, acceptance, entry and the operations of international assistance in search and rescue as well as medical operations, jointly with INSARAG/OCHA and PAHO/WHO. This is with the purpose to ensure clarity in the assistance received, and the harmonization of the work of the national and international teams into “one only response”. There is also a clear need to inform the highest level authorities of each country on the scope and benefits of the INSARAG network.
6. **The importance of strengthening the immigration, customs, surveillance and control process (IDRL processes) has been evidenced** again, as well as the registration processes, with the aim of guaranteeing the participation of the best international response teams.
7. **The Ecuador earthquake reiterates the dependency of the response operations on telecommunications.** The breakdown of telecommunications delayed the arrival of international teams, as well as the actual knowledge of the impact of the emergency. Efforts will never be enough to count on robust telecommunication systems for emergency purposes.
8. **The Virtual OSOCC platform has demonstrated its capacity to serve as space for coordination and effective and timely decision making.** However, messages communicated by affected governments need to be coordinated with their foreign ministries, with the support of the INSARAG Secretariat in this process with the Permanent missions in Geneva.
9. **The experience underlines more than ever the role that we have as focal points in respecting the procedures,** and to promote with our authorities and national risk management systems the adoption of procedures for the activation, as well as for the request of international assistance in emergencies, as well as the use of INSARAG tools such as the Virtual OSOCC.
10. **The concepts of search and rescue and the medical response need to link together at the technical level.** We also need to review the role of international teams in the rehabilitation and recuperations phases as well as the use of heavy machinery in these types of operations.
11. **We will never be prepared to face an earthquake of this magnitude, but as countries, as organizations, and as INSARAG Secretariat we must continue to work to help our communities be less vulnerable and more resilient.**

## Annex C: Contributions to the INSARAG strategy 2017-2020

### The International Search and Rescue Advisory Group Strategy 2017-2020

(To be shared at the INSARAG Regional meetings 2016 and endorsed at the INSARAG Steering Group Meeting 2017)



#### Our Vision and Role

**OUR VISION** is to save lives by promoting efficiency, enhancing quality and strengthening coordination between national and international Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams on the basis of adherence to common guidelines and methodologies.

**OUR ROLE** is to prepare for, mobilize and coordinate effective and principled international USAR assistance in support of affected countries in collapsed structure emergencies and to actively support capacity-building at the international, regional, sub-regional and national level. We do this by:

- Developing and promoting common standards for USAR assistance, coordination methodologies and tools
- Mobilizing information exchange protocols between relevant stakeholders
- Promoting cooperation and experience sharing between – and in partnership with – Member States, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) as well as national, regional and international partners.

**OUR WORK** is recognized and supported by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 57/150 of 16 December 2002 on *Strengthening the Effectiveness of International Urban Search and Rescue Assistance* and recalled in several further Resolutions. The INSARAG Hyogo Declaration on the *Recognition and Strengthening of International Urban Search and Rescue Operational Standards* and the INSARAG Abu Dhabi Declaration on *Strengthening Preparedness and Response Standards of National and International Urban Search and Rescue Operations* adopted in the first and second INSARAG Global Meetings respectively, gave us renewed impetus and guidance for our work ahead and put special emphasis on the need for national capacity building.

#### Our Values and Operational Norms

**Adherence to Common Standards and Methodology:** Members of the INSARAG network commit to adhering to the INSARAG Guidelines and methodology as globally accepted minimum standards and procedures, based upon expert knowledge and longtime experience. The INSARAG network continues to develop these standards and procedures through shared continued learning.

**Inclusiveness:** INSARAG brings together governments, governmental organizations and NGOs as well as disaster response and preparedness professionals. We particularly encourage disaster-prone countries to join the network, as well as any country or organization with USAR response capacities.

**Professionalism:** INSARAG promotes responsible, ethical and professional standards amongst USAR teams and all relevant stakeholders.

**Respect for Diversity:** INSARAG acknowledges and respects USAR team's varied operational procedures, doctrines and techniques to achieve common objectives, while disseminating principles and minimum standards agreed upon through the INSARAG network.

**Cultural Sensitivity:** INSARAG promotes awareness and respect of cultural differences by international USAR teams. This is to ensure that teams can cooperate more effectively with national and other international actors.

**Needs Driven:** The mobilization and deployment of international USAR teams is only supported when the affected country's capacities are overwhelmed and they agree to accept international assistance. The types of international assistance mobilized is based on the needs of the affected country and not driven by the availability of resources.

**Coordination:** INSARAG promotes internationally agreed coordination structures managed and advocated by OCHA, promotes coordination of preparedness and capacity building activities, and, throughout an operation, assists countries in coordinating the emergency response.

The Goals for 2017-2020 are underpinned by regionally-agreed objectives that act as a guide to implementation.

All members of the INSARAG community, led by the Global and Regional Chairs as well as the Secretariat, will work to ensure the sustainability and cost-effectiveness of INSARAG activities.

## The INSARAG Strategic Goals 2017-2020: “Fit for the Future”

**Goal 1: Promote and support the building of effective national USAR response capacities**  
*“Think Global, Act Local”*

**Goal 2: Improve the quality and coordination of USAR response**  
*“Strengthening Effectiveness: As Local As Possible, As International As Necessary”*

**Objective 1.1: Promote** capacity development in national and “first” responders considering that majority of live rescues are done by them.

**Action Plan:** Adopting national [classification accreditation](#) processes and the INSARAG First-Responders Package for communities.

**Objective 2.1: Ensure Promote** that all USAR teams with a mandate to deploy internationally go through the INSARAG External Classification (IEC) process

**Action Plan:** Advocacy with member states with international USAR teams to apply for IEC.

**Objective 1.2: Advocate** for national and regional ownership of preparedness efforts, and coordination of donor involvement, in line with national priorities.

**Action Plan:** Facilitate suitable donor and regional network support.

**Objective 2.3: Actively encourage and facilitate** the smooth transition from the ‘search and rescue phase’ into the ‘relief phase’, and greater integration within the international humanitarian community in initial recovery efforts in disasters.

**Action Plan:** Teams providing support ‘Beyond the Rubble’ and integrate with and support the relevant clusters.

**Objective 1.3: Actively encourage** innovative approaches to strengthen national capacity building through the sharing of expertise and best practices amongst countries and organizations

**Action Plan:** [Support the creation and/or articulation of networks networking](#) and synergise cross-fertilisation of best practices

**Objective 2.4: Actively promote and encourage disaster prone** countries requesting international USAR assistance, to call upon INSARAG classified teams to support initial life-saving operations.

**Action Plan:** Advocacy with disaster prone countries, with support from United Nations Resident Coordinators Office, OCHA Country and Regional Offices.

**Objective 1.4: Adopt the globally-accepted** INSARAG standards for preparedness and response and ensure INSARAG’s methodology is continually updated, improved and evaluated to be ‘fit for purpose’

**Action Plan:** Support from INSARAG Working Groups and USAR teams.

**Objective 2.5: Strengthen** and expand the ongoing technical partnerships established; such as with the World Health Organisation’s(WHO) Emergency Medical Teams(EMT) and [other international and regional organizations European Union](#) for [effective coordination in response](#).

**Action Plan:** Strengthening ongoing partnerships through joint meetings, trainings (e.g. Reception and Departure(RDC) and USAR Coordination Cell(UCC) Courses) and exercises.

**Objective 1.5: Strengthen** the collaboration and coordination with all relevant partners in preparedness for [sudden-onset](#) disasters

**Action Plan:** Training together in INSARAG Earthquake Response Exercises, establishing partnership arrangements.

**Objective 2.7: Ensure** that INSARAG’s role contributes to the international humanitarian and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) agenda.

**Action Plan:** Ongoing engagements and partnering with ISDR, IFRC and regional organisations, to help build up a first responder trained and resilient communities

**Objective 1.6: Promote** the participation and incorporation of new countries and organizations into [the INSARAG family](#).

**Action Plan:** Expand and facilitate wider outreach and membership, and participation from Disaster Prone Countries.

**Annex D: Notes on the session on the role of focal points**

<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>GROUP No. 1</b>	<b>GROUP No. 2</b>	<b>GROUP No. 3</b>	<b>GROUP No. 4</b>	<b>GROUP No. 5</b>
<p>1. You are FPs of a country with a strong seismic risk, with some national USAR teams:</p> <p>What are the actions that you as FPs carry out in your country to implement the INSARAG Guidelines and methodology for the national response?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sensitize and familiarize at political and operational level</li> <li>• INSARAG training workshops</li> <li>• Risk analysis in the country</li> <li>• Promote simulations</li> <li>• Adopt INSARAG methodology in the country</li> <li>• Review and update tools and procedures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National accreditation process using the INSARAG Guidelines as basis</li> <li>• Incorporate the standards in the disaster risk management components at national level</li> <li>• Promote participation of countries in INSARAG activities</li> <li>• Familiarization of political authorities with standards on response/receipt of international assistance, especially on bilateral response</li> <li>• Dissemination of the INSARAG Guidelines to specialized components and universities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include INSARAG Guidelines within the legal framework</li> <li>• Know who are the counterparts of the national USAR teams</li> <li>• List of actors</li> <li>• Disseminate knowledge: trainings, seminars, SIMEX exercises,</li> <li>• Use the guidelines to promote “rapid assessments”</li> <li>• Not only the INSARAG Guidelines, also UNDAC and EMT methodologies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trainings and workshops</li> <li>• Simulations and drills</li> <li>• Training programmes at all levels</li> <li>• Promotion of the national USAR process</li> <li>• Exchange of experience</li> <li>• Use of networks, VOSOCC, videos.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional training and management courses, to national accreditation systems</li> <li>• Designate national focal point to disseminate Guidelines</li> <li>• Simulations and drills</li> <li>• 2-day awareness workshops</li> <li>• Basic online course to explain use of the INSARAG Guidelines</li> <li>• Putting guidelines on the websites of the national systems,</li> </ul>
<p>2. You are FPs of a country with team that have responded internationally, but that are not (yet) INSARAG classified:</p> <p>How do you as FPs ensure that the USAR teams deployed outside your country correctly implement the INSARAG Guidelines?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• INSARAG curriculum</li> <li>• Assess and homologate for UN</li> <li>• List of trained national teams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familiarization on the Guidelines, also with Foreign ministries and political authorities,</li> <li>• Training on INSARAG guidelines, especially on the field manual</li> <li>• Establish the forum for familiarization amongst operational and policy focal points</li> <li>• Develop continuous exercises on the implementation of the INSARAG standards</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of the OSOCC guidelines</li> <li>• Cultural awareness</li> <li>• Work in the OSOCC information exchange from focal point to focal point</li> <li>• Support arrangements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have procedures that are in line with the INSARAG Guidelines</li> <li>• Post-activation meetings</li> <li>• Request a commitment from the country that the team members have knowledge of the guidelines as the normative framework</li> <li>• Strengthening the knowledge of the team leaders</li> <li>• Develop procedures that include the vision and scope of the guidelines</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compulsory refresher training prior to deployment</li> <li>• Inventory of certified USAR teams</li> <li>• National USAR operations system funded and formalized</li> <li>• Regular surveys on knowledge of the INSARAG guidelines to refresh the teams (exams on knowledge of the guidelines for teams)</li> </ul>

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have the teams carry out self-assessment methodology</li> <li>• Administrative, coordination and assessment component.</li> </ul>	
<p>3. How do you stay up to day with the developments in the methodology and how do you ensure that your own experience is being taken into consideration?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active participation in forums and working groups</li> <li>• Hosting and being part of the working groups</li> <li>• Exchange mission experiences (reports)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incorporate standards in the response plans</li> <li>• Guarantee participation into the INSARAG network through all information and dissemination mechanisms</li> <li>• Familiarize national teams with Kobo and the Virtual OSOCC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge Exchange (webinar)</li> <li>• Include information/ lessons learnt from other regions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional meetings</li> <li>• Exercises, assessments</li> <li>• Consult the regional chairmanship group</li> <li>• INSARAG website</li> <li>• Regional reports</li> <li>• Follow up to meetings</li> <li>• Ensure continuity of processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in all international meetings organized by INSARAG</li> <li>• Use technology to keep communication going</li> <li>• Strengthen the Americas regional group/ meetings by teleconferences and the function carried out by the Secretariat</li> </ul>
<p>4. A 7.9 earthquake just occurred in your country with serious impact in infrastructure and several persons killed and reported to be trapped:</p> <p>What are the key actions that you as INSARAG focal points carry out?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide information on the VOSOCC and maintain it updated</li> <li>• Promote assessment on the requirement of a request for international assistance,</li> <li>• Immediate communication with the INSARAG focal point</li> <li>• Ensure that the information reaches the decision makers for the request for international assistance</li> <li>• Prepare a briefing for LEMA on the potential support from the international community</li> <li>• Immediate communication of the focal points to define the response actions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Virtual OSOCC</li> <li>• Situation analysis and provide information on the VOSOCC</li> <li>• Alert USAR teams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide information on the VOSOCC</li> <li>• Inform the political level</li> <li>• Identify available teams</li> <li>• Issue clear messages on humanitarian tourism</li> <li>• Keep in contact with the INSARAG Secretariat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Country-internal actions</li> <li>• Activate VOSOCC</li> <li>• Contact INSARAG Secretariat</li> <li>• Analyse needs for request for international assistance</li> <li>• Activate RDC</li> <li>• Activate UCC and national OSOCC equivalent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access VOSOCC and provide official information</li> <li>• Get in touch with the national system</li> <li>• Put on alert all USAR teams</li> <li>• Get in touch with the Secretariat</li> </ul>
<p>5. A 7.9 earthquake just occurred in a country of your region with serious impact in</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow up and backstopping plan for the USAR teams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The focal point verifies: cargo manifest , capacity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The key question is what are the entry points and other requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain contact with the INSARAG Secretariat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Constant communication with the team leader</li> </ul>

<p>infrastructure and several persons killed and reported to be trapped, you consider sending your USAR team:</p> <p>What are the key actions that you as INSARAG focal points carry out, including during the deployment of the team?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure they passed through the RDC</li> </ul>	<p>of team, team fact sheet, structure of the team</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination of information on capacities and availabilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publish information on the VOSOCC Activate the team</li> <li>• Link up with focal point of the affected country</li> <li>• Support arrangements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generate a follow up and backstopping process to the deployed teams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish procedure for the production and sharing of reports.</li> </ul>
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**Annex E: List of participants**

<b>Nombre</b>	<b>Representando</b>	<b>Función</b>	<b>Telefono oficina</b>	<b>Telefono mobil/ Mobile phone</b>	<b>Email</b>
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