



XVII ANNUAL MEETING

of the INSARAG Americas Regional Group

5-6 November 2018 | Mexico City, Mexico

CHAIRMAN'S SUMMARY

The XVII meeting of the INSARAG Americas Regional Group was held on from 5 to 6 November 2018 in Mexico City, Mexico. It was hosted by the Government of Mexico in its capacity as Regional Chair and prepared jointly with the I and II Vice-chair, Argentina and the Dominican Republic respectively, as well as with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) in its capacity as the INSARAG Secretariat.

The meeting was opened by Lic. Ricardo de la Cruz Musalem, Director-General of the Mexican Civil Protection as INSARAG Americas Regional Chair. The following people also gave opening speeches:

- Ms. Gintare Eidimtaite, INSARAG Focal Point for the Americas Region at OCHA
- Mr. Antonio Molpeceres, Resident Coordinator of the United Nations System in Mexico

The meeting gathered a total of 62 participants from 19 countries of the region and beyond, as well as the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Centre for Natural Disasters Prevention in Central America (CEPRENAC), IRO Americas and the Caribbean Disaster Management Agency (CDEMA). The countries, organizations and USAR teams 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 V Regional UNDAC consultation meeting took place immediately after the INSARAG Regional Group meeting.

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.

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1. INSARAG Global Updates and Updates of Working Groups

The session was facilitated by Mr. Ricardo de la Cruz. Ms. Gintare Eidimtaite representing the INSARAG Secretariat provided a global update, putting emphasis on the structural changes at OCHA, the six decisions taken by the INSARAG Steering Group earlier in the year and the status of their implementation, as well as key activities from the Africa, Europe and Middle East (AEME) and the Asia-Pacific Regional Groups.

Mr. Sebastian Mocarquer from Chile presented the work undertaken by the Guidelines Review Group (GRG) this year, as well as on its mandate, terms of reference, composition and work plan. The GRG was going to incorporate the suggestions put forward in 2017 and would carry out a new global consultation through the Regional INSARAG Meetings and on-line, reporting to the INSARAG Steering Group. A technical reference platform/library would be considered by the GRG. Mr. Mocarquer also briefed on the fact that the 2020 Guidelines would not be a thorough re-write of the current version, only an update (“evolution not revolution”), and the aim was to ensure the document was as lean as possible.

Mr. Martijn Boer from the Netherlands briefed on the advances of the Information Management Working Group (IMWG) (previously named KoBo Working Group), including its strategic vision (“To provide an effective data management methodology that will ensure a coordinated & comprehensive collection, analysis & reporting capability, delivering the right resources to the right location in a timely manner”), objectives and work plan and next steps. These included the creation of a UCC Dashboard, enabling users to have easily visualized data on USAR operations and environment, improving and refining information collected through forms, developing new training materials and content and working closely with the GRG.

Mr. Sebastian Hodapp from Germany presented the progress of the Light Team Quality Assurance Working Group (LTQAWG) following the ISG decision to classify international light teams. Mr. Hodapp noted that the proposal of the quality assurance process was to have a full classification, which would require the endorsement of the INSARAG Policy Focal Point. Teams in countries with a national accreditation process would need to be accredited first. A light team IEC would be piloted in 2018-2019. Receiving countries will be able to specify if they require light, medium or heavy teams when requesting assistance.

Finally, Ms. Eidimtaite, presented the advances of the Medical and Training Working Groups. The latter saw a continuing roll-out of the USAR Coordination Courses and the publishing of the USAR Coordination Manual in Spanish. The next steps include the harmonization of contents with the new UNDAC Handbook and OSOCC Guidelines; advocate for the regions to provide EXCON members for the regional earthquake exercises and closely working with the IMWG to improve the USAR Coordination Manual.

2. INSARAG in the Americas – Action Points from 2017 and Activities in 2018

The Regional Chair recalled the regional work plan for 2018, which was developed 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. The following achievements were highlighted:

Strategic Objective 1: Promote and support the building of effective national USAR response

- Two online seminars on INSARAG methodology with more than 1,000 people participating from across the region and beyond;
- The publication of the USAR Coordination Manual in Spanish;
- Successful roll-out of the IESRP mechanism in Colombia and Guatemala.

Strategic Objective 2: Improve the quality and coordination of international USAR response

- Publication of the INSARAG Regional Earthquake Response Exercise Guide in Spanish;
- The organization of the SIMEX Planning and Coordination (EXCON) Course in Argentina;
- INSARAG External Classification of the Colombia SNGRD as a Medium team;
- USAR Coordination Courses in Costa Rica and the United States.

Strategic Objective 3: Improve the management and leadership of the Regional Group

- The Americas Region was well represented at the INSARAG Steering Group and Regional Meetings;
- At the time of the meeting, two News Bulletins had been published, 2018 also saw an increase the use of social media platforms to communicate with the INSARAG Network in Spanish.

Ms. Eidimtaite thanked all countries which had supported INSARAG activities through financial, personnel and in-kind contributions in 2018: Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Russia, Switzerland and the United States.

3. INSARAG External Support and Recognition Process (IESRP) of National USAR Team Accreditation Processes

Ms. Eidimtaite from the INSARAG Secretariat introduced the session with an overview of national accreditation processes in the region and the countries' interest in the IESRP mechanism, based on a survey filled out by INSARAG Operational Focal Points. Mr. Edson Vargas from Mexico followed with a presentation of the recently-launched national accreditation process in his country. Ms. Eidimtaite then presented the purpose and functioning of the IESRP mechanism, stressing that its original purpose is to support the development and strengthening of national USAR capacities and not just the recognition or badge.

Moving from theory to practice, Ms. Silvia Ballen from Colombia, as well as Mr. Walter Fonseca and Mr. Juan Campos, members of the Colombia Technical Support Group, presented the way the mechanism was activated and the process which ensued for Colombia, leading to the successful recognition of the country's national accreditation process.

Finally, Mr. José Luís Loarca representing CEPREDENAC, informed the participants about a project funded by the Swiss Development and Cooperation (SDC) for the implementation of the national accreditation system of specialized national USAR groups, which is meant to prepare Central American countries for the IESRP process.

4. Experience by Colombia with the INSARAG External Classification process

Ms. Silvia Ballen from Colombia presented the preparation for the IEC exercise, which had taken place in March. The presentation stressed the amount of time and resources required for a successful classification, but also that the event is not an end in itself. The national USAR programme in the country continues work on its training programme, ensuring sustainability of the process and in line with a five-year plan. Several participants congratulated Colombia for this great achievement.

5. Activation of international USAR response: cooperation with Ministries of Foreign Affairs

Following the outcomes of the regional meetings in 2016 and 2017, the aim of the session was to follow up on the recommendation to explore options to bridge the gap between the operational and the political levels of countries receiving and sending international USAR teams. Ms. Gintare Eidimtaite from the INSARAG Secretariat presented the relevant activities undertaken in this area during 2018, with the focus on the specific session ("Request, refuse accept: Improving the activation of international response") during the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week and the engagement of Ministries of Foreign Affairs in the preparation of the regional earthquake exercise. Mr. Martín Torres from Argentina then presented the proposal to create a protocol of communication between the INSARAG Focal Points, Secretariat and Ministries of Foreign Affairs for the Activation of international USAR response. Participants then divided into three groups and discussed the way forward. The overall sentiment was that protocols and agreements (bilateral, sub-regional, etc) already existed in the framework of international humanitarian response, but they were rarely applied by the letter in emergencies. The following points were also highlighted:

- The need to promote INSARAG in regional and international fora, as well as within the UN System at country and regional levels;
- That INSARAG is a network and thus a responsibility of all members;
- The need for an efficient and timely use of the Virtual OSOCC.

Recommendations:

- Continue working on the topic, focusing on a "soft" approach of ensuring communication flows, mutual understanding and creation of common spaces, including representation of INSARAG in various fora such as the MIAH and SENDAI Framework meetings.
- Have Ministries of Foreign Affairs as one of the Functional Groups at the regional earthquake exercise in 2019.

- Explore the opportunity to have a specific session during the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week in February 2019.

6. ISG Topics: Group Discussions

As in other Regional Meetings, the participants spent most of the second day discussing four topics:

- The INSARAG Guidelines 2020, facilitated by Mr. Sebastian Mocarquer (Chile) and Ms. Silvia Ballen (Colombia);
- Global Meeting 2020 and INSARAG Strategy 2020-2025, facilitated by Roberto Méndez (Switzerland) and Mr. Martín Torres (Argentina);
- Next steps for the IESRP mechanism, facilitated by Mr. Juan Campos (Costa Rica) and Mr. Martín Gómez Lissarrague (Argentina);
- Quality assurance of international light teams, facilitated by Mr. Sebastian Hodapp (Germany).

All group discussion summaries and recommendations are outlined in Annex B.

7. Updating the Regional Work Plan for 2019

The purpose of the session was (1) to review and adapt the specific objectives of the Regional Group for 2019; and (2) to gather contributions from the members of the Regional Group for INSARAG activities in 2019. Amb. Alejandro Daneri from Argentina introduced the session, then, the participants split into two groups and discussed whether it was necessary to review the regional objectives within the framework of the INSARAG Strategy, as well as the regional work plan for 2019.

The Regional Group agreed that the regional objectives continue to be valid. The participants proposed concrete adjustments, activities and, in some cases, made commitments for their implementation. In 2019, the following is recommended:

- Prioritize the strengthening and continuing roll-out of the IESRP mechanism through (1) the expansion/review of the Technical Support Group roster and training for its members; and (2) informing the network across the Americas about the mechanism and its purpose.
- Roll-out USAR Coordination Courses at country level, ensuring quality of training;
- Represent INSARAG at international events through Policy Focal Points;
- Prioritize the realization of the Regional Earthquake Exercise.

The following offers and commitments were made:

- Cuba proposed to host the Regional Earthquake Exercise in September;
- Chile will host the INSARAG Global Team Leaders Meeting in October, and will support IESRP-related events through the OBA;
- Costa Rica offered to host two INSARG activities in 2019;
- USA will host a USAR Coordination ToT course in February;
- Argentina offered to host a USAR Coordination ToT and an IESRP workshop, as well as the Regional Meeting next year. Argentina also committed to developing the on-line Virtual OSOCC course and including INSARAG in the agenda of the MIAH.

8. Designation of the Regional Chairmanship Group for 2019

In line with the rotation principle, Mr. Ricardo de la Cruz of Mexico handed over the Regional Chairmanship to Ambassador Alejandro Daneri of Argentina. Colombia was confirmed as the II Vice-Chair for 2019.

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

- The Regional Group confirmed the designation of Argentina, represented by Amb. Alejandro Daneri, President of the White Helmets Commission, as Regional Chair for 2019.
- The Regional Group confirmed the Dominican Republic, represented by Mr. Erdwin Olivares, Chief of Operations of the Emergency Operations Centre, as I Regional Vice-Chair for 2019.
- The Regional Group appointed Colombia, represented by Mr. Eduardo Gonzalez, Director of the UNGRD, as II Regional Vice-Chair for 2019.

9. 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 Mexico for the outstanding organization of this meeting and for the determined leadership of the Regional Group throughout the whole year.

**INSARAG Secretariat
Emergency Response Support Branch
Coordination Division, OCHA**

Annex A: Final Meeting Agenda

Monday, 5 November

- 08.00 – 08.45 Registration of participants
- 09.00 – 09.30 Opening
- 09.30 – 10.00 Introduction of Participants and Adoption of Agenda
- 10.00 - 10.30 Group Photo and Break
- 10.30 - 11.30 Global Updates from INSARAG Working Groups
- 11.30 – 12.30 INSARAG in the Americas
Action points from 2017 and Activities in 2018
- 12.30 - 14.00 Lunch
- 14.00 - 15.30 INSARAG External Support and Recognition Process (IESRP) of National USAR Accreditation Processes
Experiences from Colombia and Guatemala; CEPREDENAC Initiative
- 15.30 - 16.00 Coffee Break
- 16.00 - 17.30 INSARAG Topics
 - Colombia IEC Experience
 - Activation of international USAR response: Strengthening the engagement of Ministries of Foreign Affairs
- 19.30 Official Dinner

Tuesday, 6 November

- 09.00 - 09.30 Opening and Presentation of Group Discussion Topics
 - INSARAG External Support and Recognition Process (IESRP) of National USAR Accreditation Processes: Way Forward
 - Light Teams Quality Assurance Standards
 - INSARAG Guidelines 2020
 - Global Meeting 2020 and Strategy 2020-2025
- 09.30 - 10.15 Group Discussions
- 10.15 – 10.45 Coffee Break
- 10.45 – 13.00 Group Discussions
- 13.00 - 14.30 Lunch
- 14.30 - 15.00 Group Discussions Report in Plenary
- 15.00 – 16.00 Updating of the Regional Work Plan for 2019
- 16.00 – 16.30 Coffee Break
- 16.30 – 17.00 Designation of II Vice-Chair for 2019
- 17.00 – 17.30 Closing

Annex B: Group Discussion Summaries and Recommendations

Tópico Topic
Global Meeting 2020 and INSARAG Strategy 2020-2025
Facilitadores y persona que tomó notas Facilitators and note-takers
Roberto Méndez (SDC), Martín Torres (Argentina), Mariana Olvera (Mexico)
Tres áreas de discusión clave Three key discussion areas
1. Knowledge management <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Interoperability within the INSARAG system and between national systems• Ensuring continuity during changes of governments• Knowledge management about INSARAG methodology 2. Focal points <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strengthening the efficient activation of USAR teams through the Virtual OSOCC• Management of national response mechanisms/systems, incorporating INSARAG standards and procedures• Transition of coordination from INSARAG to national structures 3. Adaptability of INSARAG response mechanisms <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To other type of sudden-onset emergencies• To different geographical locations• To small countries• To integrate sub-regions with their contexts and implications
Tres recomendaciones/ Puntos de retroalimentación Three Recommendations/Feedback
Include the following themes/topics in the Global Meeting and Strategy: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Continuous knowledge management within the INSARAG System to ensure the methodology and standards permeate to and have continuity within national systems2. Reinforce the communication and coordination with and between focal points and politicians to influence decision-makers3. Adaptation to new geographic and emergency scenarios to ensure adequate scaling of the response.

Tópico

Topic

GRG 2020: Reference and technical resource platform or library

Facilitadores y persona que tomó notas

Facilitators and note-takers

Sebastian Mocarquer (Chile), Silvia Ballen (Colombia)

Tres áreas de discusión clave

Three key discussion areas

1. How do USAR teams exchange information and experience / lessons learned today? Is an official platform required? What form should the platform have?
2. What topics and contents should be part of this platform? Who should produce these documents? Who owns these documents? Who should authorize them?
3. Should INSARAG recognize or approve them? Who is responsible for quality control, in line with the INSARAG methodology?

Tres recomendaciones/ Puntos de retroalimentación

Three Recommendations/Feedback

1. There is consensus on the need for the existence of the platform. There is no clear consensus on what the form of the platform should be. There were suggestions that the platform should be on the INSARAG page or even on the VOSOCC, and that it should contain thematic folders and a search function. It was discussed, but there was no consensus on the need to have discussion forums and chats.

2. The topics that the platform/library should include are: training, technical information, standards, classification and accreditation reports, post-mission reports, among others. The documents can be produced by the USAR teams and organizations that are part of INSARAG. The “owner” of the resources would be INSARAG, but there must be an acknowledgment of the authorship of the documents. The use of the information is the responsibility of each team. There is no consensus on who should authorize the publication of the documents, with several suggestions, such as USAR team leaders, focal points or regional tables.

3. There is no consensus on whether INSARAG should be responsible for reviewing these documents and validating them. It is important to maintain the quality of the documents, but at the same time the practical difficulty of reviewing the information is recognized due to the workload generated for dedicated work groups or committees. INSARAG should identify the mechanism to decide if a publication is appropriate to publish.

Tópico Topic
Light Teams Quality Assurance
Facilitadores y persona que tomó notas Facilitators and note-takers
Sebastian Hodapp (@fire Germany), Gintare Eidimtaite (OCHA)
Tres áreas de discusión clave Three key discussion areas
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Regional group welcomes the pre-requisites for light teams' IEC, but three concerns were raised: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Accepting any national accreditation process (not just IRAP) which do not necessarily meet the standards of INSARAG as an entry point. ○ Policy Focal Points pushing through a classification without understanding the implications. In several countries, the Policy Focal Points are less engaged/knowledgeable of the operational and strategic response priorities. ○ Concern about the network's capacity to classify more teams, including light teams.
Tres recomendaciones/ Puntos de retroalimentación Three Recommendations/Feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval by both FPs: recommendation that the approval should be by both Policy and Operational Focal Points • Have a separate numeration for light teams – even if full IEC, not the same level of effort to classify as medium or heavy. Or in the numbers add letter “H”, “M” or “L”

Tópico Topic
National Accreditation Processes
Facilitadores y persona que tomó notas Facilitators and note-takers
Juan Campos (Costa Rica), Martín Gomez (Argentina), Eunice Franco (Mexico)
Tres áreas de discusión clave Three key discussion areas
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can we ensure sufficient Technical Support Group (TSG) capacity with the increasing demand to activate the INSARAG External Support and Recognition (IESRP) mechanism? 2. What are the best ways to incorporate the lessons learned from the Colombia and Guatemala IESRPs? 3. What is the best way to ensure that the IESRP mechanism is well understood in the region?
Tres recomendaciones/ Puntos de retroalimentación Three Recommendations/Feedback
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase the size of the TSG roster (incorporate personnel participating as classifiers in IECs) and train new (and refresh existing) members in a workshop in 2019. 2. Establish a timeline for a periodical revision of the IESRP Manual, coordinate with the GRG. Include lessons learned in the first revision. 3. Develop and implement a communication/socialization strategy about NAPs and IESRP (this should include infographics, videos, summaries, etc).

Annex C: Participants List

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