

Background

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the INSARAG network has faced unprecedented challenges and continues to adapt to be fit-for-purpose. In the INSARAG New-Year Teleconference (NYT) on the 27th of January, the Global, Regional and WG Chairs agreed that a Flexible Response Working Group (FRWG) be created in order to facilitate further discussions and develop INSARAG's Flexible Response concepts.

The NYT participants also agreed that the FRWG has an extended mandate that includes the development of the Beyond the Rubble (BtR) phase of the Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) response, including the Damage Assessment Coordination Center (DACC) concept, successfully operationalized in the Albania (2019) and Beirut (2020) responses. INSARAG can also play an important role in the support to cultural heritage preservation during a response, based on the guidance of specialized organizations such as UNESCO and their operational partners. The NYT decided that INSARAG's role in the BtR operations includes the preservation of cultural heritage should this be needed, and the DACC, and both topics be assigned to the FRWG through respective Sub-Working Groups.

The FRWG will be formed by INSARAG network's expert members from across the three INSARAG regions, OCHA's Emergency Response Section (ERS) Unit, regional organizations and specialized partners such as UNESCO - International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) and the wider humanitarian community. Relevant governmental authorities are also invited to apply. The FRWG will aim to ensure gender balance among its members. The FRWG will be composed of three Sub-Working Groups, which are (1) Flexible Response Global Position, (2) DACC and (3) INSARAG's role in the preservation of cultural heritage. Structural engineers will be invited both for the DACC Sub-WG and relevant cultural heritage USAR experts in the UNESCO Sub-WG to contribute their specialized knowledge and experience. The FRWG will be led by Co-Chairs from different regions and existing WG Chairs are also invited to contribute to the meetings.

The NYT Chairman's Summary details the decision on the formation of this FRWG and can be found in [Annex A](#).

Terms of References (ToR) and Assignment

By conducting the tasks outlined below, as directed by the Global and Regional Chairs, the FRWG will ensure extensive global consultations amongst the three INSARAG regions, whose feedback will be included in the WG's outcomes.

INSARAG has proved to remain flexible and effective despite the challenges of the pandemic and amidst a complex humanitarian environment. The FRWG will aim to contribute to the INSARAG network to continue being relevant and nimble despite the new challenges. The INSARAG network will be strengthened as a result of the review and further development of the Flexible Response concept, the strengthening of teams' deployments in the BtR phase including the DACC concept and INSARAG's role in response to affected areas where cultural heritage sites exist.

The FRWG is composed of three Sub-Working Groups with respective assignments:

1. Flexible Response Global Position

In the last few years, humanitarian emergencies have been strongly impacted by climate change. Additionally, due to the challenges imposed by the pandemic, the humanitarian landscape has become even more complex. Therefore, there have been increasing discussions on ways to effectively deploy INSARAG teams in disasters beyond those strictly involving collapsed structures. Those events can often be caused by hydrometeorological and climatological reasons which could make INSARAG teams' skills extremely relevant, such as specialized capacities for water rescue and flood disaster response.

Given the significant resources and costs associated with the establishment and maintenance of certified USAR teams as well as of their deployments, it is reasonable to explore ways on how to best maximize these professional life-saving resources of USAR teams under the INSARAG's umbrella, and through global consultations with the three regional groups of INSARAG.

While there has been initial acceptance in the Asia-Pacific and the Americas regions, the AEME region conducted a survey whose result shows there is a need for more consultations, particularly considering there are already specific modules in the European Union to deal with disasters beyond USAR.

The FRWG will:

- a) Lead and facilitate discussions on the Flexible Response concept, acknowledging regional specificities, as expressed in the NYT ([Annex A](#)); and

holistically harmonize them into an INSARAG global position and present it at the INSARAG Global Meeting in October 2021.

- b) Take into consideration the changing humanitarian environment that creates the need for a more flexible response, such as climate change and the exponential number of extreme weather-induced disasters, as compared to the frequency of earthquakes in the past decade.
- c) Review previous interventions where USAR teams have deployed in an “ad-hoc” manner to disasters caused by extreme weather and not in an USAR emergency to gather essential information on successful practices and areas for improvement.
- d) Consider the commonalities in the areas of Management, Medical Support and Logistics of the team, and the need to approach them in a modular system concept, to tailor their resources to quickly adapt.
- e) Consider the unprecedented challenges imposed by the pandemic and the lessons learnt from the Beirut response.

2. Damage Assessment and Coordination Centre (DACC)

INSARAG is nimble and flexible, as demonstrated in the network experts’ quick adaptation to new circumstances and effective assistance to local governments after USAR life-saving operations. For instance, professional structural engineers within the USAR teams have been advising and complementing local building and structural authorities on safety and integrity of structures affected by an earthquake or collapsed structure disasters. The BtR concept was first developed in 2010, endorsed in 2017, and is currently included in the INSARAG Guidelines under a common definition.

The DACC initiative is one example of a BtR activity, when local engineers are supported in their decision-making processes and damage data is collected and used by local authorities to facilitate decision-making. The DACC concept was first established in the Albanian earthquake in 2019, jointly with UNDAC, and then again operationalized in Beirut in 2020. In both cases, the DACC strongly supported governments leading the recovery efforts, based on the development of extensive procedures for DACC to support coordination between national and international engineers and local authorities. The DACC proved its effectiveness to strengthen the analysis of data gathered on the ground which enabled better team coordination, resulting in an added value that contributes to speed up a return to normality for the affected population.

Tasks:

- a) Contribute to the review, global consultations, and development of the DACC concept as part of INSARAG’s BtR operations and in accordance with the broader UN system and OCHA’s humanitarian coordination mandate. This will

- streamline international support to affected governments in a coordinated and predictable manner in line with quality standards set by the INSARAG guidelines.
- b) Propose a coordination protocol, methodology and guidelines for the DACC concept with the aim of strengthening the implementation of this specialized international assistance. Consider that DACC is established to support the local authorities on assessments and to make recommendations related to the structural integrity of damaged infrastructures, which is important for the relief and recovery operations. To be effective, DACC must be part of an overall system of damage assessment owned by the local authorities, and in complementarity with UNDAC, regional networks and globally accepted building engineering codes and standards.
 - c) Further develop the objectives of the DACC concept, including (1) the support to the local authorities to set up their own effective system of damage assessment, and (2) the coordination of the international teams to assist the local authorities-led damage assessments.
 - d) Take into account that DACC operations can include (1) the provision of support to decision-making processes, (2) the collection of damage data based on engineering decisions, and (3) the collection of general data.
 - e) Present the DACC Guidelines for global review and the final version for endorsement at the INSARAG Steering Group (ISG) Meeting in 2022.

3. INSARAG's Role in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage

The BtR phase also includes INSARAG's important role in preserving historical and cultural heritage during the deployments that involve these structures. While lifesaving is the top priority, the preservation of cultural heritage is also important. As a follow-up of the ISG Meeting in 2019, UNESCO's Emergency Preparedness and Response Unit and their first response partners have shared an operational guidance document for the deployment of INSARAG teams to sites where cultural heritage could be affected.

The UNESCO drafted Field Guidelines for USAR at Heritage Sites ([Annex B](#)) are designed to provide USAR Teams, National Disaster Management Authorities (NDMA), Local Emergency Management Authorities (LEMA), Ministries of Culture, Heritage Departments, and Cultural Heritage First Aiders (CFA) with standard procedures and guidelines when conducting operations at heritage sites in the aftermath of a disaster.

This document outlines the preparedness' policies and capacities needed for USAR teams to assist in the preservation of cultural heritage at heritage sites during their deployments, within the International USAR Response Cycle. The guide, however, encroaches upon the technical features of the INSARAG system and could cause confusion. Therefore, a joint review by INSARAG and UNESCO experts will be necessary to develop a clear INSARAG operational guidance note, which ensures lifesaving is kept at the forefront of all our operations.

Tasks:

- a) Recognize INSARAG's important role in supporting historical and cultural heritage preservation when responding to disasters, within the BtR phase.
- b) Review the UNESCO drafted Field Guidelines for USAR at Heritage Sites. Analyse the drafted UNESCO guidelines and identify areas that are useful and compatible with the INSARAG Guidelines and methodology and present the recommendations at the INSARAG Global Meeting in October 2021.
- c) Liaise with UNESCO, its operational partner ICCROM and other relevant partners concerning the next steps towards a more generic guidance note for USAR teams on cultural heritage response.

Timeframe and methodology

- a) The FRWG and its sub-WG will hold virtual meetings on a monthly basis, until it is safe for global travel.
- b) The DACC Sub-WG is expected to report its outcomes at the ISG Meeting in May 2022. The Flexible Response Global Position Sub-WG and the INSARAG's Response to Cultural Heritage Sub-WG are both expected to present their final recommendations to the INSARAG Global Meeting in October 2021.
- c) Additionally, the Co-Chairs will report on their work and outcomes at all the regional and global meetings as well as in team leader meetings. This includes the presentation of a road map on the way forward for the above-mentioned three topics.
- d) While the three sub-WG of the FRWG will work independently on their respective topics, they are expected to regularly consult and coordinate with the other WGs and with network partners, as deemed necessary.
- e) The FRWG will be active for the duration of the respective projects' assignment. The suggested FRWG Timeline can be found in [Annex C](#).

The online FRWG Registration Form can be accessed in [Annex D](#).

Drafted by the INSARAG Secretariat following guidance from the Global and Regional Chairs.

Annexes

- [Annex A](#) INSARAG New-Year Teleconference Chairman’s Summary (includes Summary of regional positions on Flexible Response)
- [Annex B](#) Draft UNESCO Field Guidelines for USAR at Heritage Sites
- [Annex C](#) Draft FRWG Timeline
- [Annex D](#) FRWG Application form

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