

Chairman's Summary
INSARAG Steering Group (ISG) Meeting
25 April 2023



The International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) Steering Group (ISG) Meeting of the Global, Regional, and Working Group (WG) Chairs was held in hybrid format in Geneva, Switzerland on Tuesday, 25 April 2023 as part of the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Weeks 2023 (HNPW). The ISG Meeting was chaired by Ambassador Manuel Bessler, the INSARAG Global Chair and Deputy Director General, Head of the Humanitarian Aid Department and Head of the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit. The event was facilitated by the INSARAG Secretariat and was attended by 173 participants, in person, from 51 countries and organizations. The list of registered participants can be found in [Annex A](#). The HNPW event gathered over 2,000 participants during the in-person week and included 47 humanitarian networks and partnerships who organized 280 sessions on thematic and cross-cutting issues on humanitarian preparedness and response.

At the request of Regional Chairs, this year's ISG featured a new format: four breakout groups on key themes, aligned with the INSARAG Strategic Plan 2021-2026. The new format proved to be an effective method of delivery, allowing more members with the opportunity to share and contribute useful ideas and improving interaction and engagement within the network.

Nine key outcomes were endorsed following the four Strategic Objectives of the INSARAG Strategic Plan 2021-2026: (1) Quality Standards, (2) Localization, (3) Flexible Response, and (4) Partnerships. The ISG PowerPoint presentation is available in [Annex B](#).

Further information on INSARAG's participation at the HNPW can be found [here](#). The Chairman's Summaries of earlier meetings and supplementary documents can be found at <http://insarag.org>.

Session 1: Opening Statements

I. Opening Statements

The session opened with a minute of silence for the victims of the Türkiye and Syria Earthquakes. This was followed by an official thank you video from the Turkish Government for the international urban search and rescue (USAR) teams that deployed there.

In his opening video statement, Mr. Alvaro Rodriguez, UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Türkiye, praised INSARAG's efforts in responding to the devastating earthquakes in Turkey. He acknowledged the crucial role of INSARAG teams in augmenting the national search and rescue efforts led by AFAD, ensuring timely and coordinated assistance to affected communities. Mr. Rodriguez emphasized the importance of investing in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery, with INSARAG playing a critical role in building community resilience. He appreciated the dedication and commitment of INSARAG teams and stakeholders, urging them to strengthen partnerships and collaboration to improve disaster response through innovative approaches and technologies.

HE. Güven Begeç, Permanent Representative of Türkiye to the UN in Geneva, delivered his opening remarks thanking the INSARAG network and all international USAR teams for their response to the February earthquakes. He emphasized that he personally was a victim of the 1999 earthquake in Türkiye. He highlighted the solidarity of the global community in sending rescuers to his country and encouraged the network to learn from this response to ensure better preparedness for future disasters.

INSARAG Global Chair, Ambassador Manuel Bessler, welcomed participants to the annual ISG, thanking members for their recent response efforts in Türkiye and Syria. He emphasized the importance of INSARAG’s work in developing standards, guidelines, and training for effective disaster response. Ambassador Bessler noted key items for discussion and endorsement, including endorsing the USAR Coordination (UC) Manual V2.0 and the First Responders Package (FRP) V2.0, and anticipating several External Reclassifications and one new External Classification. Ambassador Bessler encouraged active participation in the ISG, emphasizing its value in achieving common goals through productive working relationships.

Ms. Edem Wosornu, Chief of the Response Support Branch, expressed the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs’ (OCHA) commitment to hosting the INSARAG Secretariat and acknowledged the network’s three-decade effort towards strengthening urban search and rescue capacities. She emphasized the importance of preparing for future challenges, such as climate change-induced disasters, and commended the partnership of AFAD with the INSARAG network during the Türkiye earthquakes response. Ms. Wosornu highlighted key achievements, including compliance with quality standards, strengthening localization, and network growth and adaptability. She also mentioned challenges faced in Northwest Syria and encouraged consultation among members to improve INSARAG’s crisis response in regions without formal UN representation. She ended by saying that OCHA will continue supporting the INSARAG Secretariat and strengthening staffing for effective preparedness and response.

Mr. Sebastian Rhodes Stampa, Chief of the Emergency Response Section and INSARAG Secretary, urged the network to take full advantage of the breakout sessions and to be engaged in an active and fruitful discussion. He reminded the network that the decisions made are key to the future of INSARAG and that these decisions will be taken into the regional meetings later this year.

Session 2: INSARAG Updates

Mr. Winston Chang, INSARAG Unit Head, updated the participants on four key areas:

1. INSARAG Global Updates
 - 1.1. INSARAG External Classification/Reclassification (IEC/R) Plan
 - 1.2. INSARAG Recognized National Accreditation Process (IRNAP) Status
 - 1.3. Flexible Response
2. New Year Teleconference Outcomes
3. Key Takeaways from Team Leaders Meeting Hotwash on the Türkiye and Syria Earthquakes
4. 2023 INSARAG Moving Forward

INSARAG Global Updates

IEC/R Plan

Mr. Chang indicated that following consultations from the 2022 ISG, the 2023 New Year Teleconference, and the INSARAG External Classification/Reclassification (IEC/R) Working Group Meeting in Geneva, it was determined that the network must find a way to better manage the increasing number of IERs. With limited resources from the network and limited Secretariat capacity, expectations must be managed. Following the Türkiye and Syria deployments, some teams have asked for postponement of their IERs or a No Go from the mentor. Six teams have been given extensions of their IERs for one to two years maximum. The Secretariat can effectively manage 12 IEC/Rs per year.

IRNAP Status

Ms. Ana Maria Rebaza Delgado outlined the status of the INSARAG Recognized National Accreditation Process (IRNAP). This includes seven countries which have completed IRNAP and four that are in progress.

Flexible Response

Mr. Clement Kalonga outlined the network’s commitment to flexible response. He indicated that the INSARAG Secretariat continues to be the emergency contact point in OCHA and has facilitated flood rescue responses on multiple occasions, including deployments of INSARAG teams in Pakistan, Australia, and Malawi.

New Year Teleconference Outcomes

Mr. Chang detailed the outcomes of the New Year Teleconference in January and emphasized that the year’s workplan will closely follow the [INSARAG Strategic Plan 2021-2026](#).

Key Takeaways from Team Leaders Meeting Hotwash on the EQs

Mr. Chang listed the outcomes of the February Team Leaders Meeting in Singapore that will be tabled for discussion during the breakout sessions. Outcomes from the Team Leaders Meeting can be found in [Annex C](#).

Mr. Chang also spoke on the timeline of the USAR response to the Türkiye and Syria earthquakes. He emphasized that speed, solidarity, partnerships, effective methodology, effective coordination, and decisive response were pivotal in the success of the international USAR response. He encouraged ISG participants to join the joint briefing session with UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) and Partners (EU and IHP) on USAR operations on Wednesday where the first Hotwash report from the Team Leaders meeting will be shared.

2023 INSARAG Moving Forward

Mr. Chang highlighted the request of the INSARAG Team Leaders network, to carefully review every team’s post-mission report and complete a frank and open after-action review (AAR) to reassess and revitalize the INSARAG network, given the largest ever deployment of the network in February. He emphasized that the Secretariat will be facilitating the development of a Lessons Learnt compendium following consultations with AFAD, the global Team Leaders Group, and Qatar as regional chair of the Africa, Europe, and Middle East Region

(AEME). The compendium will contain the lessons learned and recommendations from the USAR response to the Türkiye and Syria earthquakes. This will be presented at the “**Global Forum on the INSARAG After-Action Review of the USAR response to the Türkiye and Syria Earthquakes**” to be held in Qatar in October (back-to-back with the AEME Regional Meeting). Key stakeholders involved in the USAR lifesaving response phase including ERS networks (GDACS, VO, UNDAC) and technical partners will be consulted. He further urged member states that deployed USAR teams to support the ongoing AAR. He reminded their USAR teams who deployed to submit their deployment post-mission reports if they have not yet done so, as their observations will be carefully reviewed for important lessons learnt for the network to respond better in the future.

Sessions 3-6: Breakout Sessions

The meeting room was split into four quadrants, with individual breakout groups divided by thematic area. Each breakout rotation lasted 45 minutes, allowing for all ISG members to participate in each group. The groups were facilitated by experienced working group co-chairs and the Secretariat team below.

Outcomes from the breakout sessions can be found in [Annex D](#).

Group 1: Quality Standards – Compliance of Guidelines and Methodology

Facilitator: Haruka Ezaki

Working Group Support:

Guidelines Review Group – *Martin Evers*

Medical Working Group – *Dr. Anthony Macintyre*

IEC/R Working Group – *Annika Coll, Dewey Perks, David Sochor, Tsukasa Katsube*

Group 2: Flexible Response

Facilitators: Clement Kalonga, Ana Maria Rebaza Delgado

Working Group Support:

Flexible Response Working Group -- Paul Baxter, Paolo Vaccari, Dr. Solveig Thorvaldsdottir

Group 3: Localization

Facilitator: Stefania Trassari

Working Group Support:

National Accreditation Working Group -- Sebastian Mocarquer

Training Working Group – Kira Chebakova

Group 4: Complex Emergencies

Facilitators: Sebastian Rhodes Stampa and Lucien Jaggi

Working Group Support:

Information Management Working Group – Peter Wolff

Session 7 – Summary of Key Decisions and Closing Statements

Summary of Key Decisions

Ambassador Manuel Bessler summarized the key ISG decisions following the day’s breakout sessions and presentations, as follows:

- 1. Consultations are being launched with the regional groups and the Guidelines Review Group (GRG) to review decision-making processes.**
- 2. The National Accreditation Working Group (NAWG) transitions to a new working group called National Capacity Building Working Group calling for new members. Its Terms of Reference were agreed.**
- 3. The Secretariat welcomes the INSARAG network’s support to learn from the Türkiye earthquake response leading to a global USAR lessons learnt meeting in Qatar in October, back-to-back with the Africa, Europe, and Middle East (AEME) Regional Meeting.**
- 4. The Guidelines Review Group 2023-25 will engage with the network and plan their first meeting back-to-back with the Asia-Pacific (AP) Earthquake Response Exercise (ERE) in August in Australia.**
- 5. The First Responders Program V2.0 is endorsed as the Community Responders Program, and the network is encouraged to reference this to strengthen localization efforts in their countries and regions.**
- 6. The guide on “USAR in Heritage Sites” is endorsed for the Technical Reference Library ([Annex E](#)).**
- 7. Both Flexible Response Sub Working Groups One and Three will close. The ISG thanks all working group members and the partnerships with the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM).**
- 8. The Flood Response Working Group will be established. The INSARAG Secretariat will facilitate its organization.**
- 9. The INSARAG Network will be consulted on a revised INSARAG External Reclassification (IER) system to tackle the exponential increase of IERs.**

Closing Statements

Mr. Ramesh Rajasingham, Director of OCHA's Coordination Division, thanked all the participants of INSARAG Steering Group Meeting (ISG) for their contributions and recognized the Turkish government and AFAD for their leadership and coordination in responding to the February earthquakes in Türkiye. The INSARAG's methodology, based on quality standards, localization, flexible response, and partnerships, directly contributed to a successful response that saved 300 lives, in what was the largest UN-coordinated search and rescue operation in history. The Director praised the grit and fortitude of the rescuers, recognizing that their countless hours of preparation do not go unnoticed. He also highlighted the humanitarian disaster of huge proportions in Türkiye, where an estimated 1.6 million people are residing in informal settlements, and reaffirmed OCHA's commitment to supporting the ongoing relief operation. He commended efforts to explore the role of the INSARAG network in complex emergencies and emphasized the importance of increasing flexibility in response to address the evolving humanitarian crises.

Ambassador Manuel Bessler thanked the participants of the day's ISG for their active engagement and invaluable contributions to the improvement of the network. He urged members to take the decisions made during the day's meeting forward into the regional meetings later this year and to continue to conduct their work in the true spirit of INSARAG.

Annexes

- [Annex A](#) ISG Registered Participants
- [Annex B](#) ISG PowerPoint Presentation slides
- [Annex C](#) 2023 Team Leaders Meeting Chairman's Summary
- [Annex D](#) Breakout Group Summaries
- [Annex E](#) Technical Reference Library

Drafted by the INSARAG Secretariat