

Introduction

The INSARAG New Year Teleconference of Global, Regional and Working Group (WG) Chairs was held remotely on 17 January 2024, and chaired by Ambassador Dominik Stillhart, the incoming INSARAG Global Chair and Deputy Director General of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Head of the Humanitarian Aid Department and Head of the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit. The meeting was facilitated by Ms. Aurelie Boss, Emergency Response Associate working with the Emergency Response Section, UN OCHA and INSARAG Secretariat. The meeting was attended by 58 participants.

During the meeting, the participants had the opportunity to review the achievements made in 2023 and to discuss the 2024 workplans of the three regions and working groups. The agenda for the call can be found in [Annex A](#) and the PowerPoint presentation in [Annex B](#). All documents are available in [Http://insarag.org](http://insarag.org).

Session 1: Opening Remarks on Latest Developments and Year in Review

The opening remarks were made by Ambassador Dominik Stillhart, incoming Global Chair of INSARAG, and he warmly welcomed participants to the first INSARAG Meeting of 2024 of Global, Regional and Working Group Chairs. The Global Chair acknowledged the importance of networking and extended his appreciation to all participants for their commitment to advancing international urban search and rescue capabilities. He especially thanked and recognized the contributions of past Regional Chairs - Qatar, Argentina, New Zealand, underscoring their pivotal role in the ongoing success of INSARAG and welcomed the new 2024 chairs, Pakistan as the Regional Chair for the Asia-Pacific Region, Ecuador as the Regional Chair for the Americas Region and Romania as the Regional Chair for the Africa, Europe, and the Middle East Region.

The Global Chair commended the leadership by the regional chairs in 2023 and the positive impact of the initiatives from past INSARAG meetings, particularly in Qatar in October 2023, who also hosted the Türkiye/Syria After Action Reviews (AARs) testament of a highly motivated network, always looking for ways to improve response. Looking ahead, he highlighted the upcoming launch of recommendations from the AAR, underscoring the commitment to continuous improvement and collaborative responses to urban search and rescue challenges. This positive momentum from previous meetings forms a strong foundation for ongoing efforts, he said.

Addressing the dynamic challenges posed by climate change, Ambassador Stillhart emphasized the need for adaptation in the face of evolving disaster environments. He reiterated critical issues that the network will face, such as climate change and food insecurity, urging the network to remain prepared, trained, and ready to assist those in need. Preparedness and response were underscored as critical factors to continue our strong work, emphasizing the importance of meeting as a network for ongoing exchanges to fulfil our mandate.

The crucial role of localization in humanitarian aid took centre stage, with a commitment to prioritise the strengthening of local response capacities. Furthermore, the Ambassador

highlighted the ongoing review of governance structures, with inclusivity and diversity as integral principles in shaping the future of INSARAG.

In addition, the Global Chair warmly welcomed Sarah Muscroft, the new Chief of the OCHA Response Support Branch (RSB), to advocate for, and engage actively with the INSARAG community, and recognizing her important role in advancing our collective objectives to strengthen coordination and effectiveness of our response.

Sarah Muscroft expressed her privilege and honour working with the RSB team in OCHA and the global INSARAG network, highlighting it as a remarkable model of interstate collaboration. She commended the impressive training observed during INSARAG External Reclassification (IER) exercises in Geneva last November of the UKISAR and ERICAM teams and acknowledged the unique volunteer-driven nature of INSARAG. Ms. Muscroft said that she looks forward to meeting with more members of the network, recognizing the increasing complexity in the humanitarian environment and stressing the importance of addressing localization. She reaffirmed OCHA's commitment to support INSARAG as the Secretariat and wished the network a productive 2024.

The INSARAG Secretary, Sebastian Rhodes Stampa, expressed his gratitude to colleagues who supported the network, especially the regional troika and working group co-chairs and their members. He commended INSARAG's earthquake response in Türkiye, by far the largest INSARAG response in history, and the ongoing desire of the network to constantly strive to improve for the next response. An AAR Report of recommendations will be launched at the ISG 2024 in May and an implementation plan will be shared for consultation. He announced the summary of the INSARAG Year in Review in 2023/24 [Annex C](#).

Session 2: Regional Strategic Plans for 2024

Regional Chairs shared their respective regional updates and achievements of 2023 and key points from their 2024 workplan.

i. Asia-Pacific Chair – Pakistan

Mr. Raza Iqbal, Director of Pakistan's National Disaster Management Agency, led the teleconference, introducing Lt. General Inam Haider Malik, the Chairman and 2024 Regional Chair for the Asia-Pacific Region. Key figures, including INSARAG Global Chair, Ms. Muscroft, and Mr. Rhodes Stampa, were acknowledged with gratitude.

Special appreciation was extended to the OCHA INSARAG Secretariat for organizing the event, emphasizing its significance in setting the pace for INSARAG community activities in 2024. The outgoing Asia Pacific Chair from New Zealand was thanked, and Pakistan was introduced as the new chair for 2024, committing to supporting global and regional initiatives for effective response.

Mr. Iqbal highlighted the importance of leveraging on technology in search and rescue operations, and outlining the work plan for the Asia Pacific region in 2024 aligned with strategic

objectives. Specific activities, including meetings, exercises, and conferences, were emphasized, with detailed explanations of planned events such as the ISG meeting in Geneva, IER for New Zealand, Asia Pacific Regional meeting in Islamabad, earthquake response exercise in Lahore, and the International Rescue Challenge.

Three major activities which will be conducted by Pakistan during 2024, the International Rescue Challenge, the Asia Pacific (AP) Regional Earthquake Response Exercise, and AP Regional Meeting, were presented. The agenda for the Regional Meeting, encompassing the review of strategic plans and workplan priorities for 2025, was outlined. Mr. Iqbal concluded with gratitude for the audience's patience and attention throughout the session. *Note – the Regional Meeting and AP ERE will be held in Islamabad and Lahore respectively, and all participants will be advised on the logistical arrangements planned for the events.*

ii. The Americas Chair – Ecuador

Mr. Jorge Carrillo, the Risk Management Secretary of Ecuador and 2024 Regional Chair for the Americas Region, extended warm greetings on behalf of the President of Ecuador and the INSARAG Chairmanship for the American region. He reaffirmed Ecuador's commitment to strengthening the INSARAG network and emphasized the core mission of saving lives. Expressing appreciation for the Republic of Argentina's work and leadership as the chair in 2023, Mr. Carrillo underscored Ecuador's dedication to continuing joint efforts and progress in the region together with Argentina and Brazil, members of the regional chairmanship and the other country members in the region. The work plan is based on the outcomes from the Regional Meeting held in November and the latest Regional Chairmanship meeting.

To maintain quality standards, global and regional meetings are an integral part of the work plan. Regional chairmanship meetings will be held every two months, and the Regional Meeting will be held in the last quarter will be held together with UNDAC regional consultative meeting. This year are scheduled IER exercises USA 02 Los Angeles County and CHI 01 Bomberos de Chile.

On Localization, efforts will be made to strengthen the regional Technical Support Group(TSG) and Technical Recognition Group(TRG) roster through meetings and workshops on the INSARAG Recognised National Accreditation Process(IRNAP) lessons learned, and the active participation in the INSARAG National Capacity Building working group(NCBWG) were noted. Course packages developed in the Americas on USAR National Coordination, USAR National Accreditation, and the IRNAP course for TSG/TRG experts will be translated into English for global dissemination and outreach. Trainings in the use of the INSARAG Coordination and Management System(ICMS) and relevant INSARAG tools will continue, including a technical workshop on USAR good practices.

Regarding Strategic Objective 3 on Flexible Response, the region is committed to participation in the Flood Response working group, and promoting a broader discussion with its regional members,

On bolstering partnerships, a work plan with the American Firefighter's Organization to further strengthen capacities has been agreed. Mr. Carrillo also informed that a community of practice between emergency medical teams (EMT) and USAR medical components will be promoted, as

well as the collaboration with the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) and local Fire Brigades on localization.

Finally, he highlighted INSARAG Americas Regional group is committed to participate in global discussions, strengthening USAR teams' capabilities, and addressing challenges such as climate change, and contributing to the network's overarching goals of saving lives and leaving no one behind.

iii. Africa, Europe and Middle East Chair – Romania

Brigadier General Marius Dogeanu, Head of the Directorate General for Civil Protection and Ministry of Internal Affairs of Romania assumed the role of the 2024 Regional Chair for the Africa, Europe, and the Middle East Region, extending greetings from Bucharest and expressing wishes for a successful year ahead. He acknowledged the challenges faced in 2023, particularly during disasters.

Romania takes pride in hosting INSARAG activities for the Africa, Europe, and the Middle East region, marking a special celebration of its 10-year INSARAG classification. General Dogeanu committed to contributing to INSARAG standards and activities, aligning with European Union initiatives, and expresses gratitude to Qatar for their previous chairmanship.

Providing an overview of Romania's focus areas, he emphasized quality standards, flexibility, localization, and partnerships. Planned events include classifications, reclassifications, regional meetings, an Earthquake Response Exercise in Tunisia, and technical USAR Coordination (UC) training courses in France, Italy, and Qatar.

General Dogeanu underscored the commitment to strengthening localization capacity, maintaining an active pool of experts, and supporting the national accreditation process. Romania actively participates in flexible response activities, particularly flood response exercises, and promotes collaboration between INSARAG and the European Union civil protection mechanism.

He extended thanks to the INSARAG Secretariat for their ongoing support and collaboration, emphasizing the collective commitment to advancing search and rescue capabilities and standards in the Africa, Europe, and the Middle East region.

Session 3: Updates from Technical Working Groups Chairs/Co-Chairs

Working Group Updates

Seven Chairs/co-Chairs of Working Groups delivered statements outlining the significant achievements in 2023 and the anticipated work plans for 2024. These plans are dynamic and serve as a driving force for engaging the wider network in refining and updating the INSARAG guidelines and methodology. *(Note: The Team Leaders meeting for 2024 will now be held in Brazil instead of Ecuador.)*

The Working Group co-Chairs are shown below and a detailed list of their members and workplans can be found on the [INSARAG Website](#).

i. Guidelines Review Group

Co-Chairs: John Cawcutt and Martin Evers

Mr. John Cawcutt and Mr. Martin Evers expressed their thanks to OCHA and ERS staff for the Asia-Pacific earthquake response exercise. Guidelines Review Group plans to meet three times in 2024, firstly at the Team Leaders Meeting in Ecuador (now in Brazil), and secondly and thirdly in conjunction of the regional meetings. GRG will also engage with the Governance Review Team and make sure updates are made on the next edition of Guidelines.

ii. Medical Working Group

Co-Chairs: Dr. Anthony Macintyre and Dr. Hector Fuentes

Dr. Anthony Macintyre explained on how the Medical Working Group will support the Guidelines Review Groups and revisions to the Guidelines. Dr. Anthony also stressed on the increasing recognition of the provision of medical care during disasters. The Medical Working Group continues to work on the technical reference note and has planned meetings with the WHO-EMT Secretariat in the margins of the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week.

iii. Information Management Working Group(IMWG)

Co-Chairs: Mr. Peter Wolff and Mr. Jeff Maunder

Mr. Peter Wolff explained how, through different natural disasters happened this year including the earthquake in Turkey and Morocco and the flood in Libya, Information Management Working Group has learnt and found a lot of possibilities to improve the ICMS system. IMWG plans to launch the ICMS system 3.0 in 2025, during the Team Leaders Meeting. IMWG also plans to organize several trainings on ICMS in 2024.

iv. Training Working Group(TWG)

Co-Chairs: Mr. Dewey Perks, Co-chair currently vacant

Mr. Dewey Perks talked about the leadership course scheduled in March in Doha coordinated together with the Secretariat. Dewey Perks also echoed with IMWG's idea on improving the ICMS system.

Note: The Leadership course is now postponed as only seven applicants out of 20 have met the criteria – the Secretariat and TWG will review this and announce a new date in consultations with Qatar)

v. National Capacity Building Working Group

Co-Chairs: Mr. Wahyudi Putra and Mr. Sebastian Mocarquer

Mr. Wahyudi Putra expressed thanks to all the colleagues and mentioned their anticipated participation in the leadership course in Doha based on which National Capacity Building Working Group looks to reach consensus to revise the two Manual A as the anchoring work of the Working Group. Mr. Wahyudi Putra also mentioned the need to plan advocacy work and evaluate the implementation of IRNAP in the respective regions. Lastly, the Working Group will continue to work with the Secretariat on updating the INSARAG website in order for easy access to all the documents of the Working Group.

vi. IEC/R Working Group – Quality Insurance

Co-Chairs: Ms. Annika Coll and Mr. David Sochor

Ms. Annika Coll and Mr. David Sochor expressed the IEC/R Working Group's core focus on quality assurance and accountability for the IEC/R process and will engage and consult the network in different meetings and reviews such as After-Action Review and Team Leaders meetings and to close the gaps between exercises and responses.

vii. Search and Rescue in Flood Response Working Group

Co-Chairs: Mr. Russell Gauden, Mr. Jeremy Stubbs and Mr. Jose Solla

Mr. Jeremy Stubbs acknowledged the support from the Secretariat and all the colleagues and mentioned three tasks that the Flexible Response Working Group has been working on:

1. Directory of existing flood response capabilities of the INSARAG member states.
2. Review and recommendation of globally recognized standards for INSARAG teams with flood response capacities.
3. Technical reference note on flood response to guide national capacity building of member states at a national and local level.

Session 4: Updates on the HNPW and INSARAG ISG Meeting, Issues for Consultation

Ms. Lorena Abalos, the focal point for the Humanitarian Networks and Partnership Week (HNPW) Leading Edge Programme, provided insights into the forthcoming two-week HNPW event occurring in a hybrid format from April 29 to May 10, 2024. SDC will host the event, organized by OCHA. Ms. Abalos outlined various session types, encompassing network sessions, joint sessions, Areas of Common Concern (AOCC) sessions, and the Exhibition area.

Ms Abalos presented some statistics highlighting the scale and reach of the HNPW 2024. Over 60 humanitarian networks and partners are actively involved, orchestrating a comprehensive program of more than 300 sessions throughout the event. A key focus lies in fostering cross-network collaboration, with over 120 sessions specifically dedicated to the nine AOCCs. In a bid

to enhance engagement, additional "Enablers" will be introduced at HNPW 2024, providing a structured categorization for sessions spanning cross-cutting areas.

The venue at the International Conference Centre Geneva (CICG) will host 50 exhibition stands, creating a vibrant space for interaction and showcasing. Complementing this, the virtual realm will feature 30 exhibition stands on the HNPW portal at www.hnpw.org, ensuring a seamless blend of in-person and online experiences.

Anticipating widespread participation, HNPW 2024 expects to welcome over 6000 registered participants. Of this, a significant portion, around 1200 individuals, is anticipated to attend the face-to-face component of the event, creating an enriching and diverse environment for collaborative discussions and knowledge-sharing.

During the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Week, Mr. Winston Chang, INSARAG Global Lead, detailed seven pivotal engagements for INSARAG. These included the INSARAG Steering Group Meeting, and the Medical Working Group meetings, the Annual meeting between the WHO Emergency Medical Teams (EMT) and Medical Working Group. An exhibition featuring the AAR Report launch, technical demonstrations of the INSARAG Coordination and Management System (upgraded version), a rescue robot dog, and Partnerships with the EU MODEX.

Session 5: Latest Developments and Upcoming Activities 2024 and Closing

Mr. Winston Chang noted that 22 events have been confirmed for 2024 and 16 other events will be confirmed in due time. These events include global, regional, country-level meetings, trainings, events, and exercises:

- Four Global Events: New Year Teleconference in January, IEC/R Leadership Course in March, Team Leaders, and Working Groups Meeting in April and HNPW-ISG Meetings in May
- Three Regional Meetings and Earthquake Response Exercises (EREs): (Pakistan, Ecuador, Tunisia/Romania)
- One IEC: (Azerbaijan AZE-01) and nine IERs: (Australia AUS-02, Chile CHL-01, Hungary HUNOR, Netherlands NED-01, New Zealand NZL-01, Qatar QAT-01, USA-02, Russia RUS-01, South Africa RSA-01)
- 11 Technical Meetings and Trainings: (USAR Assessment in Iran, Americas IRNAP in Panama and Honduras, five UC/ICMS Courses in Chile, China, France, Italy, Qatar, USAR Capacity scoping mission in Tanzania, INSARAG Awareness Workshop for CIS Countries and First Responders Training of Trainers (TOT) in UAE- Dates TBC)

The calendar remains a living document and is updated bi-monthly, following feedback from the network and available on the [INSARAG Website](#) and [Annex F](#).

In closing, Ambassador Stillhart expressed gratitude to Ms. Sarah Muscroft, Mr. Sebastian Rhodes Stampa, and the Secretariat team in OCHA Geneva, for their diligent efforts and dedication in addressing the issues discussed. He extended appreciation to all participants who

attended the meeting and emphasized the significance of the collective commitment to propel INSARAG's work forward.

The Master of Ceremony, Ms. Aurélie Boss, expressed gratitude to all participants for their contributions and active engagement. She encouraged members to make note of the upcoming key dates in 2024, conveniently listed in the INSARAG Calendar (Annex F). In her capacity as the Master of Ceremony, Ms. Aurélie welcomed network members to actively participate in these events.

Annexes

Annex A	NYT Agenda
Annex B	NYT presentation in PDF
Annex C	INSARAG Annual Snapshot 2023
Annex D	INSARAG Strategic Plan 2021-2026 – Endorsed Version
Annex E	Spanish Version - INSARAG Strategic Plan 2021-2026 – Endorsed version
Annex F	INSARAG 2024 Calendar