



## **The International Search and Rescue Advisory Group INSARAG**

### **What is INSARAG?**

The International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) is a network of disaster-prone and disaster-responding countries and organizations dedicated to Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) from collapsed structures and operational field coordination. INSARAG was established in 1991, following initiatives of international search and rescue teams who responded to the 1988 Armenia earthquake. The United Nations was chosen as the INSARAG Secretariat to facilitate international participation and coordination. The Field Coordination Support Section (FCSS), located within the Emergency Services Branch (ESB) of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in Geneva, functions as the INSARAG Secretariat.

### **Mandate**

INSARAG activities are guided by UN General Assembly Resolution 57/150 of 16 December 2002 on “Strengthening the Effectiveness and Coordination of International Urban Search and Rescue Assistance”. It is mandated to:

- Render emergency preparedness and response activities more effective and thereby save more lives, reduce suffering and minimize adverse consequences;
- Improve efficiency in cooperation among international urban search and rescue (USAR) teams working in collapsed structures at the site of a disaster;
- Promote activities designed to improve search and rescue preparedness in disaster-prone countries, thereby prioritizing developing countries;
- Develop internationally-accepted procedures and systems for sustained cooperation between national USAR teams operating on the international scene;
- Develop USAR procedures, guidelines and "best practices" and strengthen cooperation between interested organizations during the emergency relief phase.

### **INSARAG Structure**

INSARAG has a Steering Group and three Regional Groups (Africa-Europe-Middle East, Americas, Asia- Pacific) and a Secretariat (FCSS, OCHA Geneva). It holds annual worldwide



international USAR team leaders meetings and has ad-hoc working groups to deal with specialized issues.

The role of the **Steering Group** is to determine INSARAG policy. It meets annually to define INSARAG strategy, review achievements and identify areas for improvement. It is composed of representatives from INSARAG's Regional Groups, the chairpersons of INSARAG ad-hoc working groups, the IFRC and representatives from the INSARAG Secretariat in OCHA-Geneva.

INSARAG is organized into three **Regional Groups** in order to facilitate worldwide participation. The Regional Groups in Africa-Europe-Middle East, Americas, and Asia-Pacific meet annually to exchange experiences drawn from previous response operations. They discuss concepts for improved cooperation and coordination between international response teams in the region and present recommendations concerning worldwide issues to the INSARAG Steering Group.

INSARAG has established a **Regional Antenna** in Tunisia to facilitate the communication with North African and Middle East countries. The Regional Antenna is a permanent office, which is not a UN entity but an in-kind contribution by the host country to the INSARAG network. The sustainability of the Regional Antenna is ensured through contributions by the host country and other interested countries in the region. The activities of the Regional Antenna includes the translation of document and the INSARAG website into French and Arabic and to strengthen the network of stakeholders in the region through awareness training courses and briefing of INSARAG focal points.

INSARAG **ad-hoc working groups** develop solutions to identified problems. All INSARAG members are encouraged to participate in these working groups. Results of the working groups need to be reviewed by the INSARAG Regional Groups and endorsed in the Steering Group before implementation.

At INSARAG **annual USAR team leaders meetings**, international USAR team leaders discuss operational and technical issues regarding collapsed structure rescue.

The Field Coordination Support Section (FCSS) within the Emergencies Services Branch (ESB) of OCHA Geneva functions as the **INSARAG Secretariat**.

## **How to become a member of INSARAG**

Any country or organization with a stake in urban search and rescue is invited to join the network. Organizations wishing to apply for INSARAG membership can do so by addressing a request to the INSARAG Secretariat through their respective Governments. INSARAG member countries are requested to identify an INSARAG focal point that acts as interface with the INSARAG Regional Group and the INSARAG Secretariat.



## **The advantages of INSARAG membership**

INSARAG members are part of a worldwide knowledge-sharing network on collapsed structure rescue and operational field coordination. They are invited to annual meetings of the relevant INSARAG Regional Group and to participate in INSARAG working groups. Furthermore, members have access to INSARAG's information and knowledge-sharing tool, the "Virtual OSOCC" (Virtual On-Site Operations Coordination Centre - <http://ocha.unog.ch/virtualosocc>) and the Global Disaster Alert and Coordination System (GDACS - <http://www.gdacs.org/>) on the internet, which provide alert notification in the event of a sudden-onset disaster and real-time information updates and coordination during ongoing disasters.

## **What are the responsibilities of INSARAG members?**

As specified in GA Resolution 57/150 of 16 Dec 2002 and the INSARAG Guidelines:

Disaster-affected countries:

- Conducting damage and needs assessments as quickly as possible;
- Specifying and prioritizing the nature of assistance required in the request for international assistance;
- Facilitating immigration procedures for international relief personnel;
- Designating a government entity with unique responsibility for coordinating international relief activities;
- Providing information updates and requests immediately on the Virtual OSOCC,
- Use the Reception Centre and OSOCC to facilitate the integration of international assets in the national response effort.

Assisting countries:

- Deploying only USAR teams that comply with the INSARAG Guidelines;
- Including capacity in USAR teams to be able to cooperate with, establish or strengthen the Reception Centre or OSOCC in the field;
- Providing updates about their response on the Virtual OSOCC.



## **What is an OSOCC?**

An OSOCC is an On-Site Operations Coordination Centre set up for the purpose of assisting local authorities in a disaster-affected country with the coordination of international relief. The OSOCC should be established as soon as possible following a disaster incident by the first arriving international USAR or United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team deployed by OCHA.

## **What has INSARAG developed and achieved?**

In the years since its inception, INSARAG's achievements include:

- Adoption of UN GA Resolution 57/150 on “Strengthening the Effectiveness and Coordination of International USAR Assistance” on 16 December 2002;
- Establishment of a worldwide network of disaster relief organizations divided into three Regional Groups: Africa-Europe-Middle East, Americas and Asia-Pacific;
- Development of Guidelines for international USAR operations, including an international collapsed structure marking system (INSARAG Guidelines);
- Development of an operational field coordination system whereby Reception Centers are set up at entry points into affected countries to facilitate the arrival of USAR teams;
- Development of a concept for the On-Site Operations Coordination Centre (OSOCC) to assist the affected country with the coordination of international response, used in all major earthquakes;
- Development of standard criteria for international USAR teams;
- Establishment of a database of international USAR Teams and INSARAG member countries on the internet;
- Creation of the "Virtual OSOCC" on the internet to ensure immediate alert and real-time information exchange following sudden-onset disasters;
- Successful operational coordination of international USAR assistance in the major disasters of recent years, in cooperation with OCHA-Geneva;
- Establishment of a Regional Antenna office in Tunisia to strengthen the INSARAG network in Africa and the Middle East,
- Modification of national disaster response plans in disaster-prone countries to include INSARAG coordination methodology such as use of the Virtual OSOCC, use of the UNDAC team and interaction between local disaster management authorities with Reception Centre and OSOCC.



## **INSARAG Collapsed Structure Marking System**

INSARAG Guidelines stipulate that all USAR teams use a standardized marking system on collapsed structures at the site of an earthquake or man-made emergency. This is to ensure that international urban search and rescue teams can reliably communicate with each other, irrespective of language, in order to avoid duplication of efforts.

### **Find out more about INSARAG**

- Visit the Website: <http://ochaonline.un.org/insarag>
- Visit the “Virtual Operations Coordination Centre” at <http://ocha.unog.ch/virtualosocc>

### **Contacts**

#### **INSARAG Secretariat**

Field Coordination Support Section (FCSS)  
Emergency Services Branch  
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)  
Palais des Nations  
Avenue de la Paix 8-14  
1211 Geneva 10  
Switzerland  
Email: [insarag@un.org](mailto:insarag@un.org)

#### **INSARAG Secretariat staff, UN OCHA**

Jesper Lund (OIC), [lund@un.org](mailto:lund@un.org), Tel. office +41-22 917 1783, INSARAG Worldwide, Fundraising & Donor Relations  
Winston Chang, [changw@un.org](mailto:changw@un.org), Tel. office +41-22 917 1173, INSARAG Worldwide  
Nihan Erdoğan, [erdogann@un.org](mailto:erdogann@un.org), Tel. office +41-22 917 1188, INSARAG Worldwide  
Christophe Schmachtel, [schmachtel@un.org](mailto:schmachtel@un.org), Tel. office +41-22 917 1684, INSARAG Americas Focal Point