

Introduction

The INSARAG New Year Teleconference of Global, Regional and Working Group (WG) Chairs was held remotely on 12 February 2026, and chaired by Ambassador Dominik Stillhart, INSARAG Global Chair, Deputy Director General of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and Head of the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit. The meeting was facilitated by Ms. Stefania Trassari, from UN OCHA and the INSARAG Secretariat, and attended by 48 participants.

During the meeting, the participants had the opportunity to review the achievements made in 2025 and to discuss the 2026 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](#).

Session 1: Opening Remarks

Ambassador Dominik Stillhart, INSARAG Global Chair, Deputy Director General of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, and Head of the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Unit, warmly welcomed participants to the INSARAG New Year Teleconference. He expressed gratitude to the outgoing 2025 Regional Chairs, **Lieutenant General Vladimir Viček** from the Czech Republic, outgoing Chair for the AEME Region, **Mr. Wolnei Wolff** and **Min. Jose Solla** from Brazil, outgoing Co-Chairs for the Americas Region, and **Mr. Shinya Iwata** from Japan, outgoing Chair for the Asia-Pacific Region. He highlighted their exceptional leadership and contributions over the past year, which laid the groundwork that will guide the Regional Chairs for 2026.

Ambassador Stillhart introduced 2026 as a pivotal year for the global humanitarian system, addressing the Humanitarian Reset and the unprecedented funding cuts amid continuously rising humanitarian needs. He emphasized the need to reconsider how we work, cooperate, and deliver assistance more effectively. Ambassador Stillhart also reaffirmed localization as a central priority in the Reset, noting that strengthening national capacity is not only a priority, but also a necessity. The active role of INSARAG was highlighted, and the steps undertaken by the network to adapt to evolving risks and emerging needs, such as with the Flood Response Working Group and the Flood Response Roster. He also underscored the importance of quality assurance and of the Governance Review, which will be reflected in the INSARAG Guidelines 2026.

Ambassador Stillhart introduced some of the upcoming events for 2026, which include the Humanitarian Networks and Partnerships Weeks (HNPW) in March, which will address the future of the Humanitarian System, as well as the Global Meeting in July, which will consolidate progress and shape the future of INSARAG cooperation. He also highlighted the continuous growth of the network, which comprises 60 classified teams, a testament to the strength of the network, and the value of shared standards. Ambassador Stillhart therefore reiterated the mission of the network – to save lives and reduce suffering – emphasizing a humanitarian mandate grounded in neutrality, inclusiveness, and the humanitarian principles.

Ms. Sarah Muscroft, Chief of the Response Branch, OCHA Geneva, welcomed participants and expressed gratitude to Ambassador Stillhart and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) for their continuous and sustained support to the network over the years. She extended a warm welcome to the 2026 Troika, **Mr. Roman Kurynin** from the Russian Federation, as Regional Chair for the AEME Region, **Mr. Luis Alonso Amaya** from El Salvador, as Regional Chair the Americas Region, **Ms. Lindsay Buckingham** and **Mr. Stephen Smith** from Australia, as Regional Co-Chairs for the Asia-Pacific Region.

Amid significant restructuring of the humanitarian system, Ms. Muscroft reaffirmed OCHA's commitment to hosting the INSARAG Secretariat, recognizing the network as an essential tool and highlighting its unique partnerships with member states and its ability to foster collaboration in search and rescue operations and beyond. She addressed the Humanitarian Reset, where impossible choices must be made and where there is a need for greater agility and adaptation to evolving contexts and needs, while highlighting a reset guided by locally led responses to emergencies and crises and shaped by local priorities. She also introduced the UN80 Initiative, established to improve the efficiency and responsiveness of the United Nations and partners, ultimately reaffirming the United Nations' role and relevance in the humanitarian landscape. She elaborated on the restructuring of the UN system and its agencies, the realignment of priorities and resources to new realities, and the consequent reduction in OCHA's capacity. In reiterating OCHA's support to the INSARAG Secretariat, Ms. Muscroft extended her gratitude to member states for their continuous commitment and shared her hope that local capacity will be strengthened together, to enhance resilience and ensure communities are better prepared in the face of disasters. She looked forward to focusing this year on how response services are delivered and on strengthening regional and national capacity, within the overarching goal of saving lives and reducing suffering regardless of borders and politics.

Session 2: Briefing by the Regional Chairs

The new Regional Chairs presented their regions' strategic priorities for 2026, focusing on quality standards, localization, flexible response, partnerships, and regional capacity building.

Africa, Europe, and Middle East (AEME) Chair – Russian Federation

Mr. Roman Kurynin, Deputy Minister for Civil Defense, Emergencies and Elimination of Consequences of Natural Disasters for the Russian Federation, and 2026 Regional Chair for the AEME Region, presented the AEME Regional Plans for the year. Mr. Kurynin thanked the organizers and welcomed participants. He addressed the challenging humanitarian landscape globally and reiterated the mission of search and rescue workers – to come to the aid of people – in a neutral and inclusive manner. He highlighted the significance of INSARAG in the current context and the importance of preserving the core values of the network and its adherence to the humanitarian principles. In this regard, he emphasized the importance of reducing the polarisation of INSARAG activities, ensuring consensus among members for decision-making, as well as equal access to INSARAG events. He also expressed support to the advancement of the INSARAG methodology and the implementation of the 2026-2030 Strategy. Central to the plan are key events and initiatives to promote quality standards, localization, and partnerships, such as the AEME regional meeting in Brazil (8-9 July 2026), 9 IEC/Rs, technical courses in Italy, the United Kingdom and France, the upcoming Global Earthquake Response Exercise (ERE) in Qatar, as well as a focus on IRNAPs and the development of a TSG/TRG Regional Roster. Mr. Kurynin specifically emphasized the importance of supporting regional cooperation and contributing to initiatives in sub-regional formats, as

well as advancing search and rescue capacities in African countries, including the potential to hold a conference on this initiative. He also mentioned planned mentoring engagements in the region, such as the mentoring of USAR Teams in Iran and South Africa by the Russian Federation, France with Egypt, and the United Kingdom with Kenya, as well as the provision of additional mentors for classifications. Regarding flexible response, he noted the participation in the Search and Rescue in Flood Response Working Group and endeavour to participate in the development of other types of response.

Americas Chair – El Salvador

Mr. Luis Alonso Amaya, Director General of Civil Protection, Prevention and Disaster Mitigation for El Salvador, and 2026 Regional Chair for the Americas Region presented the regional plan, with a focus on enhancing INSARAG's work in the Americas Region and on regional cooperation. With reference to Quality Standards, he introduced a series of meetings, trainings, and events for the region, which include Regional Chairmanship meetings throughout the year, the Regional Meeting in July in Brazil, 3 IEC/Rs planned, as well as training courses and webinars. He also emphasized the importance of dissemination and the translation of INSARAG documents into Spanish. The plan also encompassed Localization Objectives, including IRNAP accreditations in Panama, Honduras, Guatemala, Canada, and El Salvador, a TSG/TRG Regional Roster, as well as a IRNAP Leadership course, and an ERE in El Salvador. Localization also includes plans for the Regional National Capacity Building Group, which involves contributing to the revision of Manual A, capacity building proposals, the harmonization of INSARAG regional national capacity building efforts with the plans of USAID and BHA, as well as the identification of global opportunities. With regards to Flexible Response, Mr. Amaya mentioned further participation in the Search and Rescue in Flood Response Working Group, particularly through the regional SAR-FR Working Group, to providing support to the global working group and analyzing regional practices and capabilities. Flexible Response initiatives also include a Flood Response Exercise to be held in Brazil. Finally, regarding partnerships, regional plans include strengthening technical partnership with the Centro de Coordinación para la Prevención de los Desastres en América Central (CEPRENAC), the implementation of an agreement with the Organization of American Firefighters (OBA), seeking opportunities for Emergency Medical Team (EMT) collaboration with OCHA's Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (ROLAC) and regional partners, and a possible collaboration with the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR).

Asia-Pacific Co-Chairs – Australia

Ms. Lindsay Buckingham, Assistant Secretary in the Humanitarian Division of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade for Australia, and **Mr. Stephen Smith**, Commissioner for the Queensland Fire Department for Australia, Co-Chairs for the Asia-Pacific Region in 2026, presented the new regional plan which focuses on collaboration and meeting the needs of the region, as well as supporting and strengthening the INSARAG network globally. They provided a comprehensive schedule of events to collectively achieve strategic objectives, which include meetings, training courses, and exercises, as well as 2 IECs and 1 IER for 2026. In addition, they outlined a commitment to high quality standards, inclusivity, coordination, and collaboration, as well as learning from local disaster responses, while identifying efficient and practical ways to sustain achievements and minimize burdens on members. Ms. Buckingham also thanked Japan, outgoing chair for the Asia-Pacific Region, for its contribution and hard work in sustaining the quality and focus of INSARAG in the region. She also expressed strong commitment to humanitarian action, to saving lives and alleviating suffering, as well as building resilience in collaboration with partners.

Session 3: Updates from INSARAG Working Groups

Chairs from the Guidelines Review, Training, Medical, Information Management, National Capacity Building, Quality Assurance, and Flood Response Working Groups provided updates on their 2025 achievements and outlined their priorities and ongoing projects for 2026.

Guidelines Review Group (GRG)

Mr. John Cawcutt reported that the 2026 Guidelines are in the final stages of editing and formatting, after being approved for a 12-month extension. He noted that all changes have been endorsed and that feedback is currently incorporated into the final draft. The new Guidelines will be presented for endorsement and approval at the INSARAG Steering Group (ISG) meeting and will be launched at the Global Meeting in Brazil.

Training Working Group (TWG)

Ms. Solveig Thorvaldsdottir reported five meetings on the Guidelines Review Documents, an ongoing triage review, and discussions on the development of a training catalogue, including courses for Team Leaders in collaboration with the Quality Assurance Working Group. She also mentioned working towards enhanced network consultations and the upcoming TWG meeting in Brazil.

Medical Working Group (MWG)

Dr. Anthony Macintyre reported a very productive year, working collaboratively with the Guidelines Review Group and helping revise the guidelines. The working group also worked on technical reference notes, providing guidance for the teams. Efforts will be continued through the MWG meeting in Brazil.

Information Management Working Group (IMWG)

Mr. Jeff Maunder announced the successful beta testing of ICMS 3.0, as well as the ongoing development of supporting tools. In this regard, feedback confirmed that the platform is stable, intuitive, and well aligned with the INSARAG methodology. The working group is working towards delivering the system at the meeting in July. He also highlighted the sustainable funding model, essential to enable progress on ICMS functions, for which 91% of members of the network have contributed to.

National Capacity Building Working Group (NCBWG)

Mr. Wahyudi L. Putra mentioned the revision of Volume 2, which introduced a holistic capacity building approach, ensuring the framework remains comprehensive and adaptable to diverse operational contexts. He highlighted three priorities, which include strengthening national USAR coordination, advancing host nation support mechanisms, and developing community responders' programs. The working group intends to propose a 3-year extension at the upcoming ISG and will issue a call for new members, to enhance collective expertise and ensure broader representation in shaping future directions.

IEC/R Quality Assurance Working Group

Mr. David Sochor discussed the 5-year process of the Guidelines Review, which included the revision of Volume 2 Manual C and the development of Volume 4, as well as a review of the IEC/R checklist. He mentioned working towards content for an online course for classifiers and discussions on supporting the INSARAG Secretariat.

Search and Rescue in Flood Response Working Group

Min. Jose Solla outlined plans to maintain and expand the flood directory and invited teams from all regions. The group seeks to advance global standards alignment, strengthening the updated technical reference notes, as well as feeding lessons learned into regional exchanges - especially around flood search and rescue coordination - to enhance interoperability and national capacity building and contribute to new training and lessons. He referred to the recent Mozambique floods, which have reinforced teams' adaptability, flexible response, and effectiveness of the VOSOCC.

Session 4: Updates on the HNPW and INSARAG Steering Group (ISG) Meeting

Ms. Sarah Muscroft provided an update on the Humanitarian Networks and Partnership Week (HNPW) which will be held in a hybrid format from 2-12 March 2026, with in-presence days in Geneva from 10-12 March 2026. The in-person session will feature two network days and a central community day, with a keynote session focused on the Humanitarian Reset, and additional topic sessions such as the Transition of Power, Resilience and Sustainability, Coordination and Efficiency, and Innovative Financing.

Mr. Martijn Viersma presented the draft agenda for the INSARAG Steering Group (ISG) Meeting that will be held on 10 March 2026, during the HNPW in Geneva. The agenda includes the approval and endorsement of the 2026 Guidelines, the 2026-2030 Strategy, the three residual areas stemming from the Governance Review, as well as updates on the Global Meeting, the Global Simulation Exercise and IMWG Sustainable Funding. The exhibition area will feature stands from INSARAG and partners.

Session 5: INSARAG Governance Review – Draft Findings of Global Consultations

Mr. Martijn Viersma presented the current status of the INSARAG Governance Review, including the consolidation of regional positions, definitions, and the plan to endorse the three residual policy recommendations at the ISG meeting in March.

On 25 March 2025, the INSARAG Steering Group endorsed the preliminary outcome of the INSARAG Governance Review, Annex 1. Upon reflection with the Regional Chairs, three Thematic Areas were further discussed during the 2025 Regional Meetings: Thematic Area 2: Decision-Making Mandate; Thematic Area 3: Accountability and Compliance; Thematic Area 7: Localization. The outcomes were discussed to ensure clarity and agreement on this critical area.

The Russian Federation reiterated that consensus should mean absence of objections from any party and raised concerns about the use of the INSARAG Recognized National Accreditation Process as a criterion for team classifications, as per its Note Verbale to the INSARAG Secretariat (19 December 2024).

Next Steps for Endorsement: Final decisions on the Governance Review will be taken at the ISG meeting in March, with the status and outstanding issues to be addressed based on regional member states' input.

Session 6: AOB and Closing Remarks

Ambassador Dominik Stillhart expressed his sincere gratitude for active participation during the call and the continued commitment of the Network. He underscored the discussions held during the teleconference, noting the strength of the network and the importance of working collaboratively, in line with INSARAG core values and shared purpose. Ambassador Stillhart addressed the current context and the humanitarian reset, where humanitarian needs and demand for life-saving responses continue to grow. He reiterated INSARAG's role in this context and the importance of strengthening local leadership, reducing long-term reliance on international assistance, and ensuring that support remains relevant, effective, and sustainable. Ambassador Stillhart extended his thanks to colleagues in the Americas and Asia-Pacific Regions, for joining the teleconference despite the time differences, as well as to the outgoing and incoming troikas, and to OCHA and the INSARAG Secretariat.

Annexes

- Annex A [NYT Agenda](#)
- Annex B [NYT Presentation](#)
- Annex C [INSARAG Annual Overview 2025](#)
- Annex D [INSARAG Calendar 2026](#)
- Annex E [INSARAG Governance Review – Draft Findings of Global Consultations](#)
- Annex F [Draft INSARAG Strategy 2026-2030](#)