

16 January 2025

Introduction

The INSARAG New Year Teleconference of Global, Regional and Working Group (WG) Chairs was held remotely on 16 January 2025, and chaired by Ambassador Dominik Stillhart, the 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 Mr. Samuel Maurer, from UN OCHA and the INSARAG Secretariat, and attended by 62 participants.

During the meeting, the participants had the opportunity to review the achievements made in 2024 and to discuss the 2025 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

The opening remarks were made by **Ambassador Dominik Stillhart**, Global Chair of INSARAG, warmly welcoming participants to the INSARAG New Year Teleconference. Ambassador Stillhart began by expressing gratitude to the outgoing 2024 Troika members for their exceptional leadership and contributions over the past year. He highlighted the exemplary efforts of Brigadier General Marius Dogeanu of Romania, 2024 Regional Chair for the Africa, Europe, and Middle East (AEME) Region, Minister Jorge Carrillo of Ecuador, 2024 Regional Chair for the Americas Region and Lieutenant General Inam Haider Malik of Pakistan, 2024 Regional Chair for the Asia-Pacific Region.

Reflecting on his first year as INSARAG Global Chair, Ambassador Stillhart shared his admiration for the unity and commitment of the network. He emphasized the importance of quality assurance in maintaining high standards for managing large-scale disasters, referencing the recent governance review to ensure agility and responsiveness to emerging challenges. Looking ahead to 2025, the Global Chair highlighted key priorities, including the strengthening of local response capacities. He stressed the critical role of empowering governments and communities to better prepare for and respond to disasters, focusing on the pivotal early hours. Initiatives such as the INSARAG Recognized National Accreditation Process (IRNAP) and the Community First Responders Training (CFRT) were underscored as essential tools for embedding INSARAG methodologies into local systems.

Ambassador Stillhart further addressed the increasing challenges posed by climate-induced disasters, referencing the devastating floods across Europe in 2024, which exposed gaps in disaster preparedness and response. He acknowledged the promising developments by the Flood Response Working Group, particularly the creation of a voluntary flood response roster, as a step toward strengthening collective capacity. In addition, the Global Chair noted the unique difficulties presented by conflict-affected emergencies as insecure environments and limited responder access demand innovation and collaboration. He reaffirmed INSARAG's commitment to adapting methodologies and maintaining the robustness of the network in addressing these crises. Ambassador Stillhart celebrated INSARAG's growth, the network now includes 58 internationally classified urban search and rescue teams. He expressed confidence in the network's ability to meet future challenges and remain at the forefront of saving lives.

In conclusion, the Global Chair expressed deep gratitude to all members of the network, recognizing the dedication and resilience of outgoing Regional Chairs, incoming Regional Chairs, working groups, and focal points worldwide. He emphasized that their collective efforts are the backbone of INSARAG's success. Looking ahead to the discussions, Ambassador Stillhart highlighted the value of the New Year Teleconference as an opportunity to connect, celebrate achievements, and prepare for the vital tasks of 2025.

Ms. Sarah Muscroft, Chief of the Response Support Branch at OCHA Geneva, addressed the participants and introduced the new Regional Chairs: Lieutenant General Vladimír Viček of the Czech Republic (AEME Region), Mr. Wolnei Wolff and Minister José Solla of Brazil (Americas Region), and Mr. Shinya Iwata of Japan (Asia-Pacific Region). She thanked Ambassador Stillhart and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation for their support in hosting the Secretariat. Ms. Muscroft reaffirmed OCHA's commitment to INSARAG's mission, highlighting its vital role in delivering life-saving assistance and fostering collaboration in disaster response. Celebrating the network's 2024 recognitions, including the United Nations Heroes Award and the ESRI Award, she echoed the importance of empowering local responders, addressing climate-induced disasters, and enhancing flexibility in response strategies, pledging OCHA's continued support in meeting these challenges.

Subsequently, **Mr. Sebastian Rhodes Stampa**, INSARAG Secretary, addressed the participants, reflecting on the network's achievements and challenges ahead. While noting that 2024 was a relatively calm year for INSARAG deployments compared to the Türkiye and Syria earthquakes in the previous year, he emphasized the importance of vigilance and preparedness. He highlighted key milestones, including the 20th anniversary of the external (re)classification system and upcoming INSARAG External Classification (IEC) of USAR teams from Georgia, Oman, and Thailand, underscoring INSARAG's ongoing commitment to growth and excellence. Mr. Rhodes Stampa also stressed the need for flexibility in tackling climate and conflict-induced challenges, referencing the fires in California as a reminder to remain prepared for diverse disasters. He called for a more inclusive network by addressing cost barriers to IEC participation for resource-constrained countries and reaffirmed INSARAG's lifesaving mission. With OCHA's continued support, he expressed confidence in the network's ability to adapt, collaborate, and effectively respond to crises in 2025.

Session 2: Regional Strategic Plans for 2025

The new Regional Chairs shared their respective regional updates and achievements of 2024 and presented key points from their 2025 workplan.

i. Africa, Europe, and Middle East Chair – Czech Republic

Lieutenant General Vladimír Viček, General Director of the Fire Rescue Service of the Czech Republic and 2025 Regional Chair for the AEME Region, presented the AEME Regional Strategic Plan for 2025. He outlined four key strategic objectives: quality standards, localization, flexible response, and partnerships. Central to the plan are key events, such as the working groups and AEME regional meeting in Prague (2-7 October 2025), which will focus on finalizing the new INSARAG Guidelines for 2026. Other major initiatives include IEC/R activities in Georgia and Oman, technical courses in Italy and the Russian Federation, and the Regional Earthquake Response Exercise (ERE) in South Africa. The plan also emphasizes collaboration with the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism through joint exercises on floods and forest fires and highlights the need for sustainable financial support for ICMS.

Lieutenant General Vlček reaffirmed AEME's commitment to cross-border cooperation, localization, and enhancing partnerships to tackle evolving disaster challenges.

ii. Asia-Pacific Chair – Japan

Mr. Shinya Iwata, Emergency Relief Coordinator of Japan and 2025 Regional Chair for the Asia-Pacific (AP) Region, presented the AP Regional Strategic Plan. The plan focuses on quality standards, particularly by supporting countries interested in IRNAP to strengthen domestic USAR capacities and fostering ties with Pacific Island nations. Key events include the Asia-Pacific regional meeting in Tokyo (7-8 August 2025), as well as the team leaders and working groups meeting in Tunisia (9-14 February 2025). Mr. Iwata stressed the importance of localization and flexible response, highlighting various training initiatives, including the USAR Coordination Course in Singapore and a Regional Earthquake Response Exercise (ERE). The plan also includes IEC/R activities involving teams from Australia, China, Singapore, and Thailand, with a strong focus on enhancing partnerships with regional organizations to improve disaster response capabilities.

iii. Americas Co-Chairs – Brazil

Minister José Solla, Coordinator General for Humanitarian Cooperation in Brazil, presented the 2025 Americas Regional Workplan, also on behalf of co-chair, **Mr. Wolnei Wolff**. The plan emphasizes INSARAG's four strategic objectives: quality standards, localization, flexible response, and partnerships. Key events include the team leaders and working groups meeting in Tunisia (9-14 February 2025), the INSARAG Steering Group meeting (25 March 2025), and the Regional Earthquake Response Exercise (ERE). The focus lies on preparing for the IECs of ECU-01 and ECU-02, as well as the IER of COL-01 in the upcoming years. Furthermore, the workplan also includes efforts to translate INSARAG documents into Spanish, to further improve regional accessibility. Significant emphasis was placed on localization, with follow-up on IRNAP processes in Honduras, Guatemala, and Panama, as well as a focus on strengthening flood response capabilities. The search and rescue in flood response initiative will involve countries like Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and the United States of America, enhancing regional disaster resilience.

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

Seven Chairs/Co-Chairs of Working Groups delivered statements outlining the significant achievements in 2024 and the anticipated work plans for 2025. These plans are dynamic and serve as a driving force for engaging the wider network in refining and updating the INSARAG guidelines and methodology.

The Working Group Co-Chairs are shown below and a detailed list of their members and workplans can be found on the [INSARAG website](https://www.insarag.org).

i. Guidelines Review Group (GRG)

Co-Chairs: Mr. John Cawcutt and Mr. Martin Evers

Mr. Martin Evers spoke on behalf of the Guidelines Review Group (GRG), presenting the timeline for the launch of the new guidelines. The new guidelines are planned to be launched at the Global Meeting in 2026. A draft of the guidelines is planned to be presented during the summer of 2025, allowing discussions to be held during the regional meetings in autumn 2025. The draft scheduled for presentation in summer 2025 will be based on decisions made at the ISG meeting in March 2025. This ISG meeting in March will also serve as the final opportunity to comment on technical, operational, and policy topics. During the Team Leaders meeting and ISG in 2026, the updated guidelines are expected to undergo endorsement.

ii. **Training Working Group (TWG)**

Chair: Mr. Dewey Perks

Mr. Martijn Viersma presented on behalf of Mr. Dewey Perks and the Training Working Group, which met in the United Kingdom in December 2024 to discuss the Türkiye-Syria earthquake response and the work plan for 2025. The group initiated revisions to Manual C and the checklist, and outlined plans to develop a handbook for IEC/R. An annual system review will also be facilitated. The checklist currently sits in the guidelines revised in the customary five-year cycle. Furthermore, the group discussed possible updates to the website to make it more user-friendly, which will be discussed at the upcoming Team Leaders Meeting in Tunis.

iii. **Medical Working Group (MWG)**

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

Dr. Anthony Macintyre, on behalf of the Medical Working Group (MWG), announced that they completed the proposed revisions to the guidelines, including the checklist items, during the latest meeting held in the United Kingdom. Due to logistical reasons, the MWG will not convene in Tunis. The next meeting will be held in New York in April or May 2025.

iv. **Information Management Working Group (IMWG)**

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

Mr. Peter Wolff delivered a presentation on behalf of the Information Management Working Group (IMWG), outlining the group's previous and ongoing activities. The IMWG has been engaged in developing a concept of operations, a three-year working plan, and its primary initiative – the development of ICMS 3.0, which is expected to introduce several significant improvements. The initial version of ICMS 3.0 is scheduled to be presented and discussed during the upcoming Working Group meeting in Tunis, followed by field testing in May. Further refinements and development will be undertaken, along with additional testing phases, before the final version is completed in the third quarter of 2025. The system is anticipated to be fully operational by 2026. The IMWG extends its gratitude to USAR.NL for securing funding for the next two years. Additionally, several training sessions have been conducted, and efforts have been made to develop comprehensive training courses to support the implementation of ICMS 3.0.

v. IEC/R Quality Assurance Working Group

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

Mr. David Sochor delivered a presentation on behalf of the IEC/R Quality Assurance Working Group, beginning by acknowledging that the upcoming 20-year milestone represents a significant quality benchmark in the INSARAG External Classification process. An overview of the activities undertaken in the past year and the anticipated initiatives for 2025 were outlined. The working group has now reached full operational capacity and comprises ten experts with diverse representation from different regions, government organisations, and NGOs. The primary focus for the upcoming year will be collaboration with the GRG to support guideline revisions. Additionally, the group will examine strategies to assist the INSARAG Secretariat in enhancing the IEC quality assurance process. This will specifically involve evaluating the application and leadership processes and developing approaches to promote awareness of the importance of classification and reclassification at the regional level and the three focal point levels.

vi. National Capacity Building Working group

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

Mr. Sebastian Mocarquer delivered a presentation on behalf of the National Capacity Building Working Group (NCBWG), expressing the group's sincere appreciation for the support received from Member States, the INSARAG Secretariat, and colleagues during its first year of operation. Throughout 2024, the group convened twice and conducted approximately a dozen meetings to advance its objectives. Special recognition was given to South Korea for hosting the first Asia-Pacific IRNAP training to develop their roster of experts. The group outlined key focus areas for 2025, including strengthening USAR capabilities for national community response and enhancing multi-hazard responses, such as flood response. Mr. Mocarquer also emphasized the development of a national USAR framework, which incorporates coordination and quality assurance through NAPs and IRNAPs, the latter of which will be held in the AEME region and potentially in Canada.

vii. Search and Rescue in Flood Response Working Group

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

Min. José Solla delivered a presentation on behalf of the Search and Rescue in Flood Response Working Group, outlining its objectives and recent activities. The Co-Chairs provided updates during their respective regional meetings, reaffirming the group's terms of reference. The working group focus remains on three key tasks: developing a voluntary flood response directory, defining standards across the three regions, and creating a technical reference note on capacity building. To support these efforts, the group conducted a survey within the community to assess capability, capacity, and ability to deploy. Furthermore, Min. Solla affirmed the objective to continue the development of the directory and the relief team initiative.

Session 4: Updates on the HNPW and INSARAG ISG Meeting

Ms. Lorena Abalos, the focal point for the Humanitarian Networks and Partnership Weeks (HNPW), provided insights into the forthcoming two-week HNPW event occurring in a hybrid format from March 17 to March 28, 2025. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

will host the event, organized by OCHA. Ms. Abalos outlined the nine areas of Common Concern (AOCC), which the sessions will be organised around.

Ms. Abalos also presented statistics highlighting the scale and reach of the HNPW 2025. A total of 70 humanitarian networks and partners are actively involved, orchestrating a comprehensive program of more than 400 sessions throughout the event. A key focus lies in fostering cross-network collaboration, with over 120 sessions specifically dedicated to the nine AOCCs. The venue at the International Conference Centre Geneva (CICG) will host 50 exhibition stands, and 20 virtual exhibition stands will be hosted on the HNPW portal at www.hnpw.org, ensuring a seamless blend of in-person and online experiences.

Anticipating widespread participation, HNPW 2025 expects to welcome over 8000 registered participants. Around 1200 individuals are expected to attend the face-to-face component of the event, creating an enriching and diverse environment for collaborative discussions and knowledge-sharing.

Mr. Martijn Viersma, INSARAG Global Lead ad interim, introduced INSARAG's plans for Network Sessions, Partnership Sessions, and the Exhibitions Area during the HNPW. The INSARAG Steering Group Meeting will be held on Tuesday 25 March at the International Conference Centre Geneva. The focus will be on the endorsement of the Global Position from the Governance Review, Volume 1 of V2026 Guidelines and Voluntary Flood Response Roster.

Session 5: INSARAG Governance Review – Draft Findings of Global Consultations 2024

Mr. Belit Tasdemir, INSARAG Governance Review Consultant, presented the draft findings of the eight thematic areas across the three regions, incorporating brief feedback gathered during the regional consultations in Bucharest, Islamabad, and Quito.

1. *Leadership and Governance*: The draft findings show the network supports Switzerland to retain the Global Chair position. There is unanimous agreement that a Deputy Global Chair role is not necessary. Consequently, the draft finding is that Switzerland will continue to hold the Global Chair position under the new five-year strategy for 2026–2031, which is set to be launched at the 2026 Global Meeting in Brazil.
2. *Decision-Making Mandates and Responsibilities*: The draft findings at the global level indicate that consensus is established in the absence of objections. Furthermore, the draft findings indicated, in cases where consensus is not achieved, the decision is to be deferred to the Global Chair, Regional Chair, and the Secretariat. Member States with differing views may present their concerns to the Regional Chairs, the Global Chair, and the relevant policy focal points, with the Secretariat facilitating discussions to reach a resolution. *Note from the Secretariat: disagreements were voiced regarding the draft findings, which may require further clarification.*
3. *Accountability and Compliance*: The feedback indicates that the guidelines should remain as guidelines with mandatory components and soft penalties. The guidelines are currently under review by the GRG, which will be endorsed at the ISG in 2026 and the 2026 Global Meeting.

4. *Global Meeting*: The draft findings show that the network feels the Global Meeting should continue, with the next one being held in Brazil in 2026.
5. *Global Strategy for 2026–2031*: Feedback from the network suggests that the INSARAG and USAR concepts should be discussed within a broader humanitarian context. Regional meetings may engage OCHA's Regional Offices to propose or implement tailored initiatives specific to their respective regions. These initiatives may be considered as part of the broader 2026–2031 strategy, which will be launched at the Global Meeting.
6. *NGOs and Partners*: The global consultations concluded that Policy Focal Points (PFPs) will serve as the final authority on the inclusion of NGOs. All regions agreed that PFP approval will remain a prerequisite for NGO inclusion in the INSARAG network.
7. *Localization*: The draft findings indicate the network feels that the regional gap analysis with local capacity building repository can be worked on and would be constructive. *Note from the secretariat: It is worthy of note that subsequent information received from the Americas expresses strong disagreements on this point, see session 6.*
8. *Classification*: The draft findings indicate the IRNAP system can be a pre-requisite for IEC if a country deems the need. However, this remains a national matter and is not mandatory.

Session 6: AOB and Closing Remarks

Regional Co-chair of the Americas region, **Min. José Solla**, expressed reservation regarding the draft findings stemming from the Global Consultations 2024. The latter related specifically to decision-making mandates, as the draft document was not perceived to accurately reflect the perspectives of the Americas Region on this issue. Additionally, the Americas Region expressed concern about the seventh thematic area, noting that the draft did not adequately reflect the region's perspectives on localization. To address these concerns, the Americas Region will conduct further discussions and submit their consolidated position by mid-February.

Mr. Vasily Evseev, representing the Russian Federation, raised concerns about the decision-making mandates and responsibilities outlined in the draft findings stemming from the Global Consultations 2024. He noted that the latter did not fully reflect the responses provided. Specifically, Mr. Evseev highlighted that there was no clear agreement in the Asia-Pacific region on question no. 2, regarding scenarios where no consensus is reached. Mr. Evseev emphasized the importance of consulting affected parties to minimize the politicization of the network.

In response to the concerns raised, **Ambassador Dominik Stillhart** emphasized that resolving these issues is a high priority for the Secretariat, to ensure the process proceeds according to the current timetable. In order to present a consolidated version for the network at the ISG in March 2025, it was agreed that feedback would be submitted to the Secretariat by mid-February, enabling the formulation of a consolidated global position for the ISG meeting.

The Global Chair formally concluded the 2025 INSARAG New Year Teleconference by expressing gratitude for participants' dedication and reaffirming INSARAG's commitment to saving lives and strengthening global resilience. Ambassador Stillhart underscored the increasing demand for humanitarian aid driven by conflicts and climate challenges, highlighting the importance of building local capacities to reduce long-term aid dependency.

The session reinforced the significance of network collaboration and adherence to INSARAG's core values. The Global Chair extended special thanks to the outgoing Regional Chairs and warmly welcomed the incoming Chairs. Appreciation was also conveyed to OCHA – particularly Ms. Sarah Muscroft, Mr. Sebastian Rhodes Stampa, and the Secretariat team – for their dedication and efforts in organizing the New Year Teleconference. Ambassador Stillhart described 2025 as a year of growth and expressed confidence in the network's collective commitment to maintaining INSARAG's leadership in disaster response.

Annexes

- [Annex A](#) NYT Agenda
- [Annex B](#) NYT Presentation in PDF
- [Annex C](#) INSARAG Annual Overview 2024
- [Annex D](#) INSARAG Calendar 2025