



# Chairman Summary: INSARAG Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting 2024

## Islamabad, Pakistan

28-29 October 2024



## Overview

The International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) is a leading humanitarian network dedicated to enhancing global search and rescue operations through standardized guidelines and resources. In 2024, Pakistan, INSARAG Asia-Pacific Regional Chair, had the honor of hosting the INSARAG Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting, which aimed to foster international dialogue, evaluate policy guidelines, and identify potential gaps in existing frameworks to better align with INSARAG's mission in the region. Held in Islamabad from October 28–29, 2024, the in-person meeting brought together 64 international participants from 15 countries, alongside 133 representatives from national agencies and organizations in Pakistan. The list of participants is enclosed in **Annex A**. The event was organized with the support of the INSARAG Secretariat and hosted by Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

The objectives of the meeting were to review and strengthen regional disaster preparedness, governance structures, localization strategies and partnerships. The key focus was on ensuring a flexible and responsive approach to natural disasters in the Asia-Pacific region. Participants also discussed INSARAG's Strategic Plan 2021-2026, assessing progress made in 2024 and identifying actions to advance the strategic goals in the coming years. Throughout the meeting, experts and INSARAG teams shared insights, proposed policy improvements and addressed challenges within existing guidelines, providing valuable recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of disaster response efforts across the region.

The meeting agenda is attached in **Annex B**.

All meeting Presentations are included in **Annex C**.

## Session 1: Welcome and Official Opening

Lieutenant General Inam Haider Malik, Chairman NDMA & INSARAG Asia-Pacific Regional Chair 2024, welcomed and thanked all participants for coming to Pakistan for the Asia-Pacific Meeting 2024. In his welcoming remarks, the emphasis was placed on the importance of fostering closer links and greater cooperation within the humanitarian community. The significance of engaging through online discussions and simulation exercises, which have become essential tools for enhancing collaboration and preparedness. INSARAG was recognized as a driving force in the humanitarian sector, playing a pivotal role in building resilient communities. It was acknowledged that while bilateral responses to disasters can be challenging, effective preparedness remains a key priority for practitioners in the field.

Mr. Winston Chang, INSARAG Global Lead, thanked Pakistan for hosting the INSARAG Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting and everyone for attending. He underlined the importance of community preparedness, with a focus on the need for a broad range of partnerships and robust coordination, particularly with local humanitarian partners. He stressed the necessity of adhering to international standards and guidelines to ensure consistency and effectiveness in disaster response efforts. Furthermore, the dedication of individual countries towards INSARAG's mission was highlighted, with a particular focus on the significance of being well-prepared for all types of disaster situations.

Mr. Mohamed Yahya, UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Pakistan, thanked the chairman for the leadership and thanked Pakistan for hosting as well as welcomed all participants to the meeting. The nationwide simulation exercises were also appreciated, as these provide valuable opportunities for testing response capabilities and improving coordination among various actors. Additionally, he commended Pakistan's commitment to disaster preparedness, recognizing the country's proactive role in strengthening its disaster management capabilities. This acknowledgement served to reinforce the importance of ongoing efforts in building national resilience and enhancing preparedness for future disaster scenarios.

## Session 2: Global and Regional 2024 Workplans and Updates

Ms. Haruka Ezaki, INSARAG Asia-Pacific Regional Focal Point, presented the INSARAG Global Updates and she highlighted various global events and regional updates from Africa-Europe-Middle East (AEME) and Americas regions in 2024. She stressed the importance of Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) courses in enhancing the USAR Coordination Cell (UCC) during deployment. By incorporating USAR courses, responders gained critical skills that improve coordination and operational readiness, particularly in complex urban disaster scenarios. This integration would help build cohesive and well-prepared teams, reinforcing INSARAG's effectiveness in disaster response.

Mr. Winston Chang, INSARAG Global Lead, reported on the IEC/R events in 2024 and highlighted the upcoming IEC/R in 2025, particularly the IEC/R in the Asia-Pacific. He presented progress on the INSARAG Steering Group (ISG) outcomes and working group updates and underlined the 2024 Governance Review Report which is an extensive consultation across the INSARAG network, which would be discussed at the regional level. The regional positions would shape the Global Position, with final decisions at the HNPW ISG meeting in 2025. He highlighted the Türkiye earthquake response as a case study, underscoring the real-world value of these initiatives and encouraging focal points to actively participate in working groups. Mr. Chang also emphasized the future leadership goals and policy development for 2025.

Representing the Regional Chair, Mr. Raza Iqbal, Senior Director Plans NDMA, the INSARAG Operational Focal Point, shared updates on regional strategic objectives for 2021-2026, focusing on quality standards, localization, partnerships and flexible response frameworks. He highlighted key milestones, including the INSARAG Steering Group (ISG) Meeting in Geneva, IEC/R events in New Zealand and Australia, the International Rescue Challenge and Asia-Pacific Earthquake Response Exercise (APERE) in Lahore, Pakistan, and the INSARAG Recognized National Accreditation Process (IRNAP) Leadership Course in South Korea. These initiatives underscored INSARAG's commitment to regional resilience through collaboration, capacity building, and adaptable response strategies across Asia-Pacific.

## **Session 3-6: Governance Review Consultation Part 1-3 – Setting the Stage, Regional Consultation and Reporting of 3 Breakout Discussions**

Mr. Alan Toh, an ex-member of the Singapore Civil Defence Force, set the stage for the breakout sessions by introducing the topics and dividing the participants into three groups: Group A, Group B, and Group C. The groups were organized under the following topics:

- A. Group A. Leadership and Governance & Decision-Making Mandate and Responsibilities.
- B. Group B. Global Meeting, Accountability and Compliance & Classification and Global Strategy 2026-2030.
- C. Group C. NGOs and Partners.

Group A. Leadership and Governance & Decision-Making Mandate and Responsibilities, Mr. Raza Iqbal from Pakistan moderated the session. The key points on leadership and governance highlighted that approximately 71% of participants believed the regional chair should not serve as the deputy global chair. However, there was support for the deputy global chair being selected from the Asia-Pacific region, given its high disaster risk and ensuring experience of its professionals. Concerns were raised that if training and other responsibilities were assigned to the deputy global chair, this could have significant implications for the INSARAG Steering Group (ISG) structure and its operations.

Group B. Global Meeting, Accountability and Compliance & Classification and Global Strategy 2026-2030, was moderated by Dr. Farhan from Rescue 1122 Punjab. The main points highlighted were that 57% of the participants believed that the INSARAG Global Meeting and resource allocation to key INSARAG activities should continue, as these were essential to its strategy. Participants acknowledged that it was challenging for member states to meet all standards, especially in responding to diverse disasters. Setting uniform response standards for emergencies could place pressure on countries. The majority supported INSARAG guidelines, advocating for a flexible approach to response.

Group C. NGOs and Partners & Localization, was moderated by Mr. Shinya Iwata, Emergency Response Coordinator / Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. All participants agreed that INSARAG policy and operational focal points should be designated solely within public institutions, such as disaster management agencies, rather than private agencies or INGOs. This preference stemmed from legal restrictions in some countries, where the roles of INGOs and partners are limited and clearly defined, making them unsuitable for these critical responsibilities.

## Session 7: Summary of Day One

Mr. Muhammad Umar Chattha, Executive Director of Plans, and Mr. Raza Iqbal, Senior Director of Plans and INSARAG Policy Focal Point for Pakistan, welcomed participants to the second day of the regional meeting. The session began with a review of key takeaways from Day 1, followed by an overview of the agenda for the discussions and collaborative activities planned for the day. Reflections from Day 1 included the following points:

- A. Emphasizing the role of the INSARAG External Classification (IEC) in advancing efforts for Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) and flood response.
- B. Clarifying that the INSARAG Regional Chair should not serve as Deputy Global Chair.
- C. Advocating flexibility in response mechanisms.
- D. Reinforcing the importance of designating INSARAG policy and operational focal points from public or disaster management agencies rather than private organizations like INGOs and NGOs.
- E. Asia-Pacific regional group discussed the Regional Position of Governance Review on 8 thematic areas. The Asia-Pacific Regional Position will be compiled by INSARAG Secretariat and will be tabled during the New Year Call (Global chair and 3 regional chairs) and the Global Position will be endorsed at the INSARAG Steering Group meeting (ISG) 2025.

## Session 8: Reflect Türkiye Response AAR to AP Regional Planning and Priority

Ms. Haruka Ezaki, INSARAG Asia-Pacific Regional Focal Point, provided insights into the response to the Türkiye earthquake, discussed during the global and regional meetings held in New Zealand last year. A key takeaway was the readiness of regional groups to receive and host international assistance, specifically in coordinating and providing logistical support for incoming international USAR teams. The second point was the readiness of first responders, volunteers and the community. Thirdly, partnership with UNDAC and other stakeholders was highlighted in last regional meeting. She then reviewed Asia-Pacific action items, regional planning, and priorities for the upcoming year and highlighted the importance to reflect the AAR to the regional planning and events to further strengthen the readiness and response in the region.

Mr. Winston Chang, INSARAG Global Lead, highlighted regional readiness to receive international USAR assistance and key points from the 2023 global meeting held in Qatar, where a comprehensive report was developed on the Türkiye and Syria earthquake response. This report followed an after-action review of the region's highest-magnitude earthquake and evaluated the international assistance and response efforts deployed.

Mr. Belit Tasdemir, a member of AKUT Search and Rescue Association, discussed the challenges encountered in adapting the INSARAG system in the first large deployment during the Türkiye earthquake response. He emphasized the difficulties faced in setting up the Reception/Departure Center (RDC) at the airport during the Türkiye earthquake response in 2023, particularly due to a lack of knowledge among the staff. This highlighted the necessity for disaster response training in the country. He stressed the importance of coordinating and integrating with the INSARAG system to enhance coordination and ensure an effective response during disasters.

Mr. Edy Prakoso, the Director of Operations at the National Search and Rescue Agency of the Republic of Indonesia (BASARNAS), emphasized the importance of improving coordination in frontline response by adopting the INSARAG methodology. Indonesia has integrated the quality standards and localization principles outlined in the INSARAG Strategic Priorities for 2021-2026. This national strategy is essential for enhancing the effectiveness of response efforts and coordination among national responders. As part of this implementation, Indonesia established USAR experts at the local level and pooled resources for INA-01. In 2023, four Search and Rescue (SAR) offices received national accreditation, with an additional four offices targeted for accreditation by 2025. The localization approach highlights the need to build capacity and resilience in these efforts.

Mr. Taehyun Cho, Deputy Director of International Affairs at the National Fire Agency of the Republic of Korea, emphasized the importance of partnerships with UNDAC and other relevant stakeholders in responding to earthquakes. Following the After Action Review (AAR) of the 2023 Türkiye and Syria earthquakes, he stressed that collaboration and joint training between UNDAC and Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams resulted in quicker deployment and improved coordination during emergencies. He also highlighted the significance of information sharing through the INSARAG Coordination Management System (ICMS) to enhance cooperation among the involved teams. Additionally, he mentioned the UNDAC Induction Course 2024 in Korea, approximately 25 per cent of the participants have a USAR background. He stated that the Korea Disaster Relief Team (KDRT) would include UNDAC members when mobilizing for emergencies. Strengthening partnerships was emphasized to ensure a more coordinated and effective response during disasters.

Dr. Rizwan Naseer, Secretary of the Emergency Services Department for the Government of Punjab, Pakistan, discussed the response to the Türkiye earthquake in 2023. He emphasized that a key lesson learned from this response was the importance of strengthening community responders for immediate action. He also highlighted the need to focus on risk prevention during disasters to mitigate potential losses. Additionally, enhancing coordination between UNDAC and INSARAG was identified as crucial. Ultimately, empowering community responders is essential for effective disaster response.

## **Session 9: INSARAG Strategic Plan 2021-2026 and Application into the AP Workplan 2025**

The session on the application of the INSARAG Strategic Plan 2021-2026 into the Asia-Pacific (AP) Workplan 2025 focused on four strategic objectives, with discussions facilitated through breakout groups. The first objective, Quality Standards, emphasized strengthening the INSARAG External Classification / Reclassification (IEC/R) process, with Mr. David Lewis (Australia) and Mr. Safrizan Bin Suhaini (Malaysia)

leading the discussion. The second objective, Localization, addressed funding challenges and support for countries implementing the INSARAG Recognized National Accreditation Process (IRNAP), facilitated by Mr. Qu Minhao and Mr. Navin Balakrishnan (Singapore).

The third objective, Flexible Response, explored adaptive approaches to disaster response, guided by Mr. Jeremy Stubbs (Australia) and Mr. Raza Iqbal (Pakistan). Lastly, Partnerships focused on fostering collaborations, with Ms. Haruka Ezaki (OCHA) and Mr. Taehyun Cho (Republic of Korea) facilitating discussions. These breakout sessions provided a platform for participants to align the strategic plan's objectives with actionable goals for the AP region, setting the groundwork for regional priorities in the 2025 workplan.

## **Session 10: INSARAG Strategic Plan and Application into the AP Workplan 2025 - Continued**

Session 10 continued the discussions from Session 9 on the INSARAG Strategic Plan's application to the Asia-Pacific Workplan 2025. Participants rotated between breakout groups to encourage diverse perspectives on each strategic objective.

This approach allowed for broader input and enriched the dialogue on Quality Standards, Localization, Flexible Response, and Partnerships. The session aimed to incorporate a wider range of insights, ensuring that the AP workplan reflects the collective expertise and priorities of all participants. This collaborative process strengthened the foundation for setting actionable objectives for 2025.

## **Session 11: Reporting back - Summary of the AP Workplan 2025 and Development of AP Regional Calendar 2025**

On the first breakout topic Quality Standards, participants proposed several key initiatives to strengthen training and capacity building across the Asia-Pacific region. They suggested making an E-Learning Package available on the Asia-Pacific cloud drive for Asia-Pacific members, with resources contributed by Thailand (THA-10). Additionally, they recommended sharing the INSARAG Webinar Training on IEC/R, hosted by Thailand (THA-10). Further training proposals included a Structural Engineers Course provided by Russia (RUS03) and an Environmental Response Training Course offered by Pakistan (PAK01). The Philippines also expressed a need for support in capacity building, underscoring the importance of regional collaboration to enhance disaster response readiness.

On the Second topic "Localization", participants shared their progress on the National Accreditation Process (NAP) and the INSARAG Recognized National Accreditation Process (IRNAP). China, Indonesia and Türkiye were advancing their response programs, with Türkiye already benefiting from its established IRNAP. Malaysia and Australia were working on expanding NAP and IRNAP, with Australia also supporting the Pacific islands. Nepal was focusing on community preparedness and first responder training, aiming to implement these by 2026. Singapore had enhanced community resilience with the My Responder app and public education. Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, the Russian Federation and Samoa were

developing or refining localized response plans, highlighting the region's commitment to strengthening disaster response through localized training and partnerships.

During the discussion on the Breakout topic "Flexible Response/Flood Response", the emphasis was placed on the need for adaptable frameworks capable of rapid response, scalable to different levels of disaster impact. This approach reflects a proactive strategy to reduce response times and improve coordination during flood emergencies. Key stakeholders involved in disaster response were encouraged to adopt a flexible mindset and prepare for varying flood scenarios, ensuring readiness for quick deployment when necessary. Moreover, participants highlighted the importance of Quality assurance in flood response relies on identifying national competencies and ensuring a coordinated, structured approach. Swift coordination and clear roles enable effective resource deployment. Regular evaluation of national teams enhances response capacity and future preparedness.

During the discussion on Breakout topic "Partnership", participants highlighted the importance of establishing strong regional relationships, particularly among ASEAN countries, as well as key partners like Japan, Australia, China and the Republic of Korea. Notable initiatives included joint exercises and training programs led by Pakistan in collaboration with Nepal, Maldives and Sri Lanka. Additionally, effective disaster management also relies heavily on robust partnerships at various levels within each country. The successful examples came from countries like Indonesia, Australia, China, Türkiye, and Nepal, where governments work closely with local communities and NGOs to establish integrated response networks. The Pacific countries have shown a growing interest in the INSARAG and the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) mechanisms. These countries, while operationally close to their neighbors, recognize the added value of engaging with international frameworks to enhance their disaster response capabilities.

## Session 12: Member States Announcements

Ms. Haruka Ezaki, the INSARAG Asia-Pacific Regional Focal Point, invited participants to share any announcements or requests. In response, Australia announced the launch of an informal network for women, set for 2025. Singapore announced hosting UC Course training from 10-14 March 2025. China would host the International Search and Rescue event from 24-30 March 2025. Japan, the INSARAG Regional Chair 2025 announced that the Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting is scheduled to take place on the 7-8 August 2025 in Tokyo, Japan. Additionally, Singapore (Operation Lionheart Contingent) would host the IER from 25-29 August 2025<sup>1</sup>, and both Australia and Thailand would host IER and IEC operations, respectively.

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<sup>1</sup> SCDF had revised the date of their IER to 18-21 August 2025.

## Session 13: Key Regional Meeting Outcomes, Presenting the new Troika 2025, AOB & Closing Address

Ms. Haruka Ezaki, INSARAG Asia-Pacific Regional Focal Point, presented the key outcomes from the recent regional meeting:

- The regional chair expressed gratitude to all member countries for their engagement and commitment to INSARAG, particularly highlighting South Korea and PAK-01 for organizing global and regional flagship events: the IRNAP Leadership Course in Korea, the International Rescue Challenge (IRC), and the Asia-Pacific Earthquake Response Exercise (APERE) in Pakistan;
- Three teams had been preparing for the International Emergency Classification (IEC) process in 2025, specifically from China-Hong Kong, Ramunion Rescue Brigade, and THA-10. Additionally, six countries aimed to achieve NAP/IRNAP status in the coming years to enhance localization efforts;
- Localization remained a key priority for the Asia-Pacific region. In this context, Indonesia and Pakistan were focusing on first responders and community rescue initiatives, while the regional group was supporting capacity building for the Pacific Island Countries;
- To strengthen the IEC/R framework in the Asia-Pacific region, all INSARAG-classified teams were providing classifiers in accordance with the decisions made by the Quality Assurance IEC/R Working Group;
- During the meeting, participating countries presented their positions for the Governance Review, and the Asia-Pacific Regional position for the review was included as **Annex D** in the chairman's summary;
- The Asia-Pacific Regional Group conducted an After Action Review (AAR) of the Türkiye Response to further enhance emergency preparedness and response at the regional level. A work plan was developed, including regional mapping of hazards, commitments, and resources;
- The regional group also supported the review of the INSARAG Guidelines Version 2026 by providing valuable inputs. To ensure that regional perspectives were considered during the guideline development process, the regional group continued to actively participate in the Working Groups;
- An informal Women in USAR Group was proposed for the establishment, with Meg Northrope, Australia Policy Focal Point, as the contact person;
- Furthermore, the regional group welcomed Japan as the INSARAG regional chair for 2025, with the next regional meeting scheduled for August 2025 in Tokyo;
- The regional group also thanked South Korea for considering hosting the INSARAG Global Meeting in 2026;
- Following the Information Management Working Group (IMWG) meeting in September 2024 regarding support for the IMWG Strategy and a new Version 3.0, the Asia-Pacific Group supported the IMWG Strategy, with future contributions to be determined;

- Finally, the Asia-Pacific Regional Group expressed appreciation to Pakistan for hosting a series of key regional events, including the IRC, APERE 2024, and the INSARAG Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting in 2024.

Mr. Ken Cooper from New Zealand, Outgoing Regional Chair, expressed his gratitude to Asia-Pacific member countries, the INSARAG Secretariat, and the host, Pakistan, through his pre-recorded video greetings. He also highlighted the importance of cooperation in the region to strengthen the partnership and national capabilities.

In the closing session, the Regional Chair, Lieutenant General Inam Haider Malik, Chairman NDMA, expressed appreciation for the active engagement and commitment of all member countries. Moreover, the Chairman NDMA emphasized the need to expand the scope of disaster response to include rural, desert, coastal, and marine areas, alongside urban settings. Enhancing compatibility and interoperability across regions and agencies remained critical, particularly through INSARAG's guidelines. The challenge of sustaining sub-regional teams, tapping into supplementary volunteer potential, and leveraging technology-driven approaches like virtual training and simulations were highlighted as key steps forward. Finally, addressing the language challenges, culture and infrastructure differences remained crucial in ensuring effective, inclusive, and coordinated search and rescue efforts.

Mr. Vincent Omuga, Deputy Head of Office at OCHA ROAP, expressed his gratitude to all members of the Asia-Pacific Region and the INSARAG Secretariat for their contributions to the success of the meeting. He emphasized the importance of discussions on localization, stating that it is a priority for OCHA and crucial for ensuring rapid and efficient responses that effectively reach those in need. He looks forward to the potential for further integration between INSARAG and ROAP.

On behalf of the INSARAG Secretary, Mr. Winston Chang closed the 2024 INSARAG Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting by thanking all present participants for their active inputs and the Pakistan NDMA for the great hospitality during the meeting. He further expressed deep appreciation for the strong commitment of the INSARAG network and encouraged member states to collaborate in the future events.

## Visit to National Emergency Operating Centre (NEOC)

After the closing of the INSARAG Asia Pacific Regional Meeting, participants visited the NEOC. The visit highlighted Pakistan's commitment to adopting cutting-edge solutions for disaster management and fostering regional collaboration.

The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks by the Chairman NDMA.

## Annexes:

- Annex A: List of Participants
- Annex B: Meeting Agenda
- Annex C: AP Meeting Presentations
- Annex D: Asia-Pacific Regional Position for Governance Review