

Lessons Learned

The lessons learned during the mobilisation, deployment, operations and disengagement phases of the international SAR teams which responded to this disaster are numerous and varied. Listed below are those, which are in need of urgent redress, to enhance international SAR Response in future:

- 8.1 A number of SAR Teams (including several of those registered in the International Directory of SAR and actively involved in INSARAG) failed to inform DRB, OCHA-Geneva (FCSU) of their deployment.
- 8.2 DRB, OCHA Geneva (FCSU) had difficulties contacting responsible SAR focal points in the capitals of assisting countries, to ascertain the SAR Team's status or disposition after deployment.
- 8.3 Most SAR Teams deployed in Turkey were not complying or operating within the INSARAG Protocols, especially on issues relating to self-sufficiency.
- 8.4 SAR Teams did not adhere to operational recommendations as per the International SAR Response Guidelines
- 8.5 SAR Teams failed to designate personnel to assist with OSOCC duties.
- 8.6 Few SAR Teams pooled resources to establish Sub-OSOCCs in support of on-site coordination amongst the teams.
- 8.7 It was evident that in a disaster covering such a wide geographical area a series of Sub-OSOCCs reporting to the Main OSOCC would have been of immense operational benefit.
- 8.8 Although the Airport Reception Centre was strategically positioned at Istanbul International Airport, a compromise was reached on the positioning of the OSOCC within the Crisis Centre at Istanbul, against a suitable site near the scene of major SAR activities in Izmit. It was felt at the time that the OSOCC could better serve the coordination function and information flow, by being sited within the Crisis Centre at Istanbul
- 8.9 Those SAR teams who first arrive in country should share responsibility for initiating the coordination systems.
- 8.10 The UNDAC complement, and speed of response to this disaster should serve as a benchmark for future responses, and the benefits of a rapid deployment should not be compromised pending clear and concise instructions from the affected country UNDP Office or National Authorities.
- 8.11 The overwhelming international SAR response to this disaster identified many SAR teams hitherto unknown to the INSARAG family.
- 8.12 During the initial stages (3 days) of SAR Operations following a massive deployment of international SAR teams, the OSOCC(s) had no substantial capacity to coordinate operations other than those directly related to Search, Rescue and Medical issues. The containment of secondary effects (fires, HazMat and other potential hazards) likely to hamper SAR operations also need to be coordinated.
- 8.13 SAR Teams need to have a clear understanding of OCHA's responsibilities as far as the OSOCC and UNDAC Teams are concerned.
- 8.14 Office space permitting, DRB, OCHA-Geneva should reconsider the use of the designated Operations Centre which can be activated and staffed 24 hours a day, acting as the nerve centre for such international operations.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Considering the scale of the disaster, its geographical coverage and the massive international SAR response, the SAR teams gave an excellent account of themselves, working in an unselfish, dedicated and tireless manner in their search and rescue operations, in the best tradition of humanitarian response. The International SAR response accounted for 142 live rescues and the recovery of 609 bodies.

The UNDAC team responded rapidly by any previous standard, taking the unprecedented decision to mobilise without a clear acknowledgement from UNDP Ankara or indeed the GoT, once the scale and geographical extent of the disaster was becoming apparent.

Coordination on-site, although not to the standard and precision one might have hoped for, played an important role in taking stock of SAR assets on the ground, ensuring full cohesion with the local SAR effort and overseeing and assisting where necessary with the teams' departure from Turkey.

Many of the lead officers within the international SAR teams knew each other, were familiar with and expected a coordinating platform and had previous contact with UNDAC members, which assisted in no small way in the exchange of information and troublefree operations on-site. This reflects positively on the important role played by INSARAG through meetings, seminars, workshops, training and exercises since its inception in 1991.

The Turkish Earthquake has opened up many windows of opportunity, to take stock of all international SAR assets, improve existing coordination mechanism and encourage a more meaningful and dedicated participation in the INSARAG concept by all interested parties. I feel that there is no need to go back to the drawing board, it is more a case of making adjustments to existing schemes and systems to provide an effective, efficient, safe and properly coordinated international SAR response.

International SAR Teams need to be reminded that they have co-ownership and responsibility for coordination and that operating as independent units, detached from other SAR Teams and the national SAR response, is not within the spirit of INSARAG and is counterproductive to on-site coordination.

With this in mind, I recommend the following:

9.1 DRB, OCHA-Geneva

- 9.1.1 DRB, OCHA-Geneva should make a concentrated effort to promote the INSARAG, UNDAC and the OSOCC concept amongst UNDP Offices and the Governments of disaster-prone countries. Both disaster assisting and affected countries should be familiar with the INSARAG Protocols, to ensure a smooth and rapid interface of International SAR Teams into SAR operations.
- 9.1.2 Countries contributing to the UNDAC concept should ensure that they have sufficient numbers of members available, to meet current and future demands for UNDAC missions.
- 9.1.3 The Operations Centre at DRB, OCHA-Geneva should be re-commissioned and personnel trained to operate the centre to sustain 24-hour operations in support of SAR assets and UNDAC members on mission.
- 9.1.4 DRB, OCHA-Geneva should consider time permitting, deploying European based UNDAC member with the first SAR Teams deploying from Europe.

9.2 Government of Turkey

- 9.2.1 The GoT should be encouraged to become more involved in INSARAG with a view to raising awareness of the recommendations listed in the INSARAG Beuggen Protocols

“Recommendations for disaster-affected countries” and strengthening their national SAR capacity.

9.3 INSARAG

- 9.3.1 SAR Teams should keep DRB, OCHA-Geneva informed of their movements once the decision is taken to mobilise them to the disaster area.
- 9.3.2 SAR Teams should be encouraged to make use of the information technology ‘Virtual OSOCC’ facilities, currently offered by DRB, OCHA-Geneva by way of the OCHA Relief Web.
- 9.3.3 SAR Teams should follow the recommendations listed in the INSARAG Beuggen Protocols “Recommendations for countries providing international assistance”
- 9.3.4 SAR Teams should follow the operational guidelines and recommendations on good operational practices as listed in the INSARAG International SAR Response Guidelines
- 9.3.5 SAR Teams should build adequate redundancy into their complement to enable them to detach members (2 to 3 persons) in support of OSOCC operations and appoint a Liaison Officer with technical knowledge of SAR operations, to remain in the assisting country and act as Focal Point between the team and DRB, OCHA-Geneva.
- 9.3.6 The INSARAG should encourage at Regional Group level, greater participation in meetings, conferences, courses, training and exercises with the view to securing wider membership and securing an INSARAG presence in the regions. Also INSARAG should be used as a reference point for SAR Teams wishing to develop or improve their existing SAR capability.
- 9.3.7 The Directory of International SAR Teams should be revised and updated, to include all those teams which responded to this disaster and take stock those now ready to deploy internationally.
- 9.3.8 SAR Teams should be trained on “SAR Response and the International Environment” (Emergency Response Awareness Course –ERA Course) to include the role of the UN and OCHA’s mandate, expectations and realistic deliverables by OCHA-Geneva

9.4 OSOCC

- 9.4.1 The first SAR Teams arriving in country should commence setting up the OSOCC(s) in anticipation of a large influx of international SAR response.
- 9.4.2 Rapid Respond SAR Teams in the Americas, Europe/Africa and Asia Pacific should be identified as ‘Lead OSOCC Teams’ and be pre-tasked, equipped and trained to operate as OSOCC initiators (in addition to their normal SAR duties), pending the arrival of UN personnel and other SAR Team members in support of coordination operations.
- 9.4.3 DRB, OCHA-Geneva should provide a core management staff for OSOCC duties to provide advice, guidance and overall coordination, with the bulk of staffing provided by members from international SAR Teams, National Authorities and agencies responding to the disaster.
- 9.4.4 Operational conditions permitting, the OSOCC should be established close to the scene of greatest SAR activity and likely to attract the largest numbers of SAR Teams.

- 9.4.5 Where a disaster covers a wide geographical area consideration should be given to the establishment of Sub-OSOCCs to decentralise coordination and relieve operational pressure on the Main OSOCC.
- 9.4.6 During the initial stages (3 days) of a major international SAR response operation, the OSOCC(s) should remain truly focussed on coordination issues relating to Search, Rescue, Medical and the containment of secondary effects. It does not make good operational sense to expect the OSOCC(s) during this intense period of activity, to facilitate coordination on other humanitarian relief issues.