

**CO-CHAIRMEN'S SUMMARY REPORT OF THE SECOND ISM ON SEARCH AND
RESCUE, SINGAPORE, 26-28 MARCH, 1997
CO-CHAIRMEN'S REPORT**

1. The ASEAN Regional Forum Second Inter-sessional Meeting on Search and Rescue Co-ordination and Co-operation (2nd ARF ISM SAR), jointly organised by the Republic of Singapore and the United States of America, was held on 26-28 March 1997 in Singapore. This was as recommended by the First ARF ISM SAR in Honolulu on 4-7 March 1996 and agreed to by the ARF Ministers at the Third ARF Ministerial Meeting in Jakarta on 23 July 1996. The 2nd ARF ISM SAR was jointly chaired by Ambassador Chew Tai Soo, Deputy Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Singapore, and Mr Charles Kartman, Acting Assistant Secretary of State of the United States of America.

2. The primary objective of the 2nd ARF ISM SAR was to explore possibilities for enhancing SAR co-operation and co-ordination among the ARF participants; to co-operate on a regional basis to raise the overall level of SAR expertise among countries in the Asia-Pacific; to help build mutual trust and confidence; and to promote greater co-operation and co-ordination among the ARF participants' civilian and military SAR agencies. In this regard, the 2nd ARF ISM SAR looked into the following:

- i. Further explore areas of SAR co-operation agreed to at the First ARF ISM SAR with a view to operationalising them;
- ii. Examine possibilities for enhancing regional co-operation on SAR including regular workshops among Asia-Pacific SAR agencies, SAR training programmes and courses, and SAR training centres;
- iii. Prepare a set of guiding principles and code of conduct on SAR co-operation to manifest the ARF member countries' commitment to work towards closer co-operation on SAR matters so as to enhance regional effectiveness and efficiency in the conduct of SAR missions; and
- iv. Facilitate interaction among existing SAR agencies, whether civilian or military, among ARF participants, as a confidence building measure.

3. The agenda of the ARF ISM SAR is attached at Annex A. The programme of activities is attached at Annex B. The list of participants who attended the Meeting is at Annex C.

4. The ARF ISM SAR was attended by 19 ARF participants. Representatives from the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) were present as Observers. Mr Kishore Mahbubani, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Singapore, and the Vice-Admiral Roger T. Rufe, Commander, Pacific Area, United States Coast Guard, gave keynote addresses. As with the First ARF ISM SAR, the Meeting was attended by senior representatives and officials from the Foreign, Defence, Aviation, Communications, Transportation, Maritime, and other Ministries and Agencies involved in ARF policies and SAR matters. This helped continue the process started at the First ARF ISM SAR of realising the ARF as an avenue to strengthen regional co-operation and confidence building.

5. The discussions centred on two key themes, namely, SAR Co-operation and SAR Training, through six sessions over two days. Delegates from thirteen countries, as well as the representatives from ICAO and IMO, made presentations. A list of presentations is at Annex D. Separate lunches were hosted for military and civilian delegates respectively on the second day. A practical search and rescue demonstration involving the Republic of Singapore, the United States of America and the Republic of Indonesia was also conducted on the last day, to illustrate the benefit of close co-operation among regional ARF participants.

6. The following is a summary of the key points discussed.

Topic 1: SAR Co-operation

7. The Meeting agreed unanimously on the value of greater SAR co-operation and co-ordination among ARF participants for the purpose of saving lives. Several ARF participants identified areas of co-operation to work towards, such as greater contacts amongst ARF SAR agencies through all available channels of communication, continued sharing of information, including on regional SAR contact points, through all available means like facsimile messages and the setting up of internet websites; holding of joint SAR exercises on a voluntary basis; and co-operation in SAR training including the provision of SAR training assistance to ARF participants.

8. The Meeting also agreed on the importance of good media management of maritime and aviation incidents, and the importance of timely and accurate information. Several delegations shared information on their respective countries' experiences in these areas. The Meeting also noted the importance of having a media spokesman and training RCC officials to handle the media. The Meeting recognised that there was scope for ARF participants to exchange experiences on media management, to learn from each other.

9. The Meeting noted the importance of bilateral and multilateral agreements and arrangements as frameworks within which SAR agencies operate. Several ARF participants briefed the Meeting on their respective bilateral SAR agreements and arrangements with other countries, particularly those with other ARF participants. The Meeting also noted the growing multilateral co-operation in SAR among ARF participants. The Meeting agreed on the importance of expeditious facilitation of search and rescue into the incident area for the sole purpose of saving lives.

10. The Meeting noted the usefulness of modern technological communications systems, like the COSPAS-SARSAT satellite rescue system and Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS), in enhancing the effectiveness of SAR operations. The meeting discussed ways of simplifying SAR procedures, to render speedy humanitarian assistance during the mounting of SAR operations, with due consideration to and respect for territorial sovereignty.

Topic 2 : SAR Training

11. The Meeting had a fruitful and productive discussion on the possibilities for SAR Training Co-operation among ARF participants. Such training co-operation could take place at either bilateral or tripartite level, taking into account the context, needs and level of expertise of the participating countries; and could be multifaceted to include table-top exercises, attachments and training of trainers. Many delegations acknowledged the usefulness of the wealth of information provided at the Meeting and recognised the important function the ARF was performing in enhancing regional SAR training co-operation. The Meeting welcomed the idea of the designation of existing national SAR training institutions as ARF SAR Training Centres (ARF SARTCs), which could form a basis for the continued sharing of information and pooling

of regional resources, and contribute to tangible confidence building and the raising of overall SAR expertise in the region. To form the basis of an in-depth consideration by ARF participants of the proposal, a Concept Paper will be circulated by the proponents. Singapore, Australia and China indicated their willingness in this respect. Various ARF participants circulated papers on their national SAR organisation, capabilities, RCCs, training centres and courses.

Conclusion

12. The Meeting was very successful and productive, and accomplished the objectives laid out. The discussions were frank, substantial and constructive. The Meeting recognised that greater SAR co-operation and co-ordination contributed positively to increasing comfort levels and building confidence among ARF participants, and that such ARF inter-sessional Meetings were useful in this regard. The Meeting also noted the importance of integrating national SAR agencies, and strengthening bilateral and multilateral SAR arrangements and co-operation.

13. The Meeting noted the positive steps made by various ARF participants to implement recommendations by the 1st ARF ISM SAR in Honolulu in 1996 to enhance Greater search and rescue co-ordination and co-operation among ARF participants. These include continuing exchange of information among SAR agencies through all available means, updating the directory of regional SAR contact points resulting from the 1st ARF ISM SAR, setting up of SAR internet websites, and offers of assistance and co-operation in SAR training and exercises. The Meeting also agreed that a matrix of existing bilateral SAR agreements and arrangements be produced, with the assistance of IMO and ICAO, to enhance closer regional SAR coordination and co-operation.

14. The Meeting agreed to the proposal to compile a list of ARF SARTCs for submission to the ARF Senior Officials to be recommended to the ARF Ministers for endorsement. The Meeting welcomed Singapore's offer to conduct an annual 9-week SAR Training Course for ARF participants, and to convene a SAR Conference in December 1997 for SAR planners and officials. The Meeting also welcomed Singapore's offer of up to 15 Training Awards per year for developing ARF participants in the region for the 9-week SAR Training Course, as well as Thailand's offer to invite observers to their annual SAR exercises, New Zealand's offer of two places to ARF participants for their Air Directing Officer course, and Australia's offer to re-open its national SAR courses to participants from 1998.

15. To guide further work on SAR co-operation and co-ordination under the ARF framework, the Meeting agreed to recommend the following list of principles and objectives to the ARF Senior Officials for consideration and adoption by the ARF:

Recognising that Search and Rescue (SAR) operations are essentially humanitarian mission.

Recognising that all SAR agencies, ships and aircraft in the vicinity of a maritime or aviation accident are obliged under IMO and ICAO conventions to respond appropriately on receipt of a distress signal or when a ship or aircraft requiring assistance is detected;

Recognising the importance of providing immediate assistance to persons, ships and aircraft in distress;

Recognising that such assistance should be provided regardless of the nationality of such ships and aircraft and their passengers and crew.

Understanding that the provision of effective and expeditious SAR services is crucial to save lives and reduce suffering during maritime and aeronautical accidents.

Understanding that the mounting of SAR operations solely for the purpose of saving lives should be consistent with applicable national laws, rules and other regulations and with relevant international laws and conventions and other bilateral and multilateral agreements and arrangements and should respect the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries.

Noting that co-operation and co-ordination among countries will significantly enhance SAR operations and increase confidence building in the region.

Desirous to improve the level of SAR expertise among ARF participants; and

Desirous to enhance and promote regional co-operation and co-ordination on SAR within the broader framework of ARF co-operation and confidence building.

Affirm that all areas of co-operation and co-ordination in SAR to be developed will be consistent with existing international laws and rules of procedures of the IMO and the ICAO on SAR operations, and agreed to work towards:

- a. Establishing effective co-ordination measures and communications procedures on SAR matters, including the continuing exchange of information on Search and Rescue Points of Contact, current SAR resources available to ensure mutual knowledge of regional SAR capabilities;*
- b. Co-operating to allow the employment of all available and appropriate means as are deemed practicable and necessary for SAR operations to minimise suffering and anguish to the survivors, regardless of the nationality or status of such a person or the circumstances in which that person is found;*
- c. Simplifying procedures to facilitate co-ordinated and expeditious response of SAR units for the purpose of SAR operations;*
- d. Standardising SAR training manuals and procedures, consistent with the procedures and recommendations laid down by the IMO and the ICAO;*
- e. Increasing co-operation in SAR training and exercises to raise the level of SAR expertise in the region; and*
- f. Realising the ultimate goal of a seamless, well-co-ordinated, integrated, effective and expeditious global search and rescue system by way of mutual regional and bilateral agreements and arrangements consistent with IMO and ICAO conventions.*

The Meeting also noted that nothing in the above list of principles and objectives shall compromise or affect existing or future agreements and arrangements entered into by ARF participants.

16. The Meeting was held in the traditional spirit of ARF cordiality and solidarity. The Meeting also expressed appreciation to the Republic of Singapore and to the United States of America for their able co-chairmanship, and thanked the Republic of Singapore for the warm and generous hospitality accorded to the participants to the Meeting.