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Agenda Item 4: Follow-up to the NACC/WG 2023-2024 work plan

SEARCH AND RESCUE IMPLEMENTATION TASK FORCE (SAR/TF) PROGRESS REPORT

(Presented by the SAR/TF Rapporteur)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	
This Working Paper presents the progress made by the Search and Rescue Implementation Task Group (SAR/TF) since its previous progress report. This Paper includes details of the activities undertaken and draws attention to points that merit the attention of the entire NACC/WG.	
Action:	Suggested Actions are described in Section 6
Strategic Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Safety• Air Navigation Capacity and Efficiency
References:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Convention on International Civil Aviation• Annex 12 – <i>Search and Rescue</i>• Preliminary Report of the Fifth Meeting of the Search and Rescue (SAR) Implementation Task Force of the North American, Central American and Caribbean Working Group (NACC/WG/SAR/TF/5), ICAO NACC Regional Office, Mexico City, 23-27 September 2024.

1. Introduction

1.1 Search and Rescue (SAR) is an essential element to ensure a safe global aviation system, which allows for an effective response to situations that endanger the lives of aircraft occupants, regardless of the airspace or territory in which they are located.

1.2 Contracting States, individually or in cooperation with other States, must make the necessary arrangements to establish and promptly provide SAR services within their territories, or in the airspaces for which they have assumed responsibility through regional agreements, to ensure that assistance is provided to persons in distress. Such services shall be provided 24 hours a day.

1.3 The provision of SAR services is an indivisible part of the responsibilities of States with respect to the provision of air navigation services, as part of the Convention. All airspace users must be guaranteed an effective and efficient SAR service, consistent with the international requirements assumed by States for these airspaces in which they have agreed to provide Air Navigation Services (ANS).

2. Background

2.1 During the fifth meeting of the Air Navigation Implementation Task Force in the NAM/CAR Regions (ANI/WG), a SAR Implementation Task Force (SAR/TF) was created to streamline activities related to SAR implementation and enhance regional cooperation to meet the ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) of Annex 12 – *Search and Rescue*, as well as regionally agreed objectives.

2.2 The objective of this task force is to develop and implement a work programme to ensure the continued and consistent provision of SAR services in the NAM/CAR Regions, in accordance with the SAR Plan for the CAR Region, as well as agreed regional goals.

2.3 Since 2019, the SAR/TF has been holding annual meetings, usually accompanied by refresher workshops on the main concepts of SAR service, as well as the expected improvements to these services.

3. Main challenges

3.1 According to the results of the ICAO Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP), the effective implementation (EI) of the SAR area in the CAR Region is 54%. We can use this as a reference to identify the main challenges of SAR coordination in the CAR Region.

3.2 Lack of organization of SAR services in accordance with the requirements of Annex 12.

3.2.1 The difficulties faced by the provision of SAR services in the CAR Region are closely linked to the lack of recognition of the importance of SAR coordination as part of normal operations for the provision of ANS. Unfortunately, in several States in our Region the notion that SAR services are a temporary component that is activated only in the event of accidents is still maintained. The lack of knowledge of routine SAR coordination activities leads to the assumption that SAR services can be organized spontaneously and without a defined structure in the event that requires them, ignoring that the time and pre-established procedures, periodically reviewed and tested, significantly affect the possibility of rescuing the occupants of aircraft that suffer an accident.

3.2.2 9 States of the CAR Region have not made arrangements for the establishment and provision of SAR services in their territory or in the areas where these States have assumed responsibility for providing these services.

3.3 Lack of competent and experienced SAR personnel.

3.3.1 Due to the lack of knowledge of the functions of the SAR service, the CAR Region lacks sufficient SAR personnel with the appropriate training and experience to provide the necessary functions of the SAR service.

3.3.2 It is wrongly assumed that personnel providing SAR functions can do so without proper training or as an additional job to other functions related to ANS. In several cases, SAR personnel who have already been trained and have accumulated the required experience are replaced by personnel without proper training and experience.

3.3.3 9 States of the CAR Region do not ensure that each Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) or Rescue Subcentre (RSC) employs sufficient competent personnel for SAR coordination and operations functions. 12 States of the CAR Region do not ensure that their RCC or RSC have 24-hour personnel who are proficient in the use of the English language.

3.4 Lack of SAR operational procedures for RCCs and RSCs.

3.4.1 Several States of our Region that have assumed responsibility for the establishment of RCCs and RSCs have done so without the proper development of SAR operational procedures.

3.4.2 8 CAR States have not established an RCC or RSC in each SAR Region, in accordance with the responsibility they have assumed through regional air navigation agreements. 12 CAR States do not ensure that each RCC or RSC has prepared operational plans for the conduct of SAR operations.

3.5 Lack of SAR agreements.

3.5.1 The lack of SAR agreements is a problem that unfortunately persists in the CAR Region. Even the States with greater resources and the most advanced SAR coordination and response systems base their SAR system on the signing of SAR collaboration agreements.

3.5.2 13 States in the CAR Region do not ensure that their SAR organizations coordinate their operations with the SAR organizations of neighbouring States. 11 States in the CAR Region have not established the conditions for SAR units from other States to enter their territory to search for the site of an accident or to rescue possible survivors.

3.6 Lack of SAR exercises

3.6.1 SAR exercises are a valuable tool to evaluate the functioning of the SAR system, detect non-compliance, and assess the effectiveness of the SAR response before undesirable situations may occur.

3.6.2 11 States in the CAR Region do not ensure that SAR personnel are regularly trained and that SAR exercises (SAREX) are periodically conducted.

4. SAR activities in the CAR Region.

4.1 An interregional SAR exercise (SAREX) was conducted from 13 to 16 May 2024, hosted by France. The purpose of this SAREX was to assess SAR operational procedures, Letters of Agreement (LoAs) and SAR response, rehearsing various contingency scenarios involving the Search and Rescue Regions (SRRs) of Cayenne, Paramaribo and Piarco, and the associated RCCs and RSCs of the aforementioned SRRs.

4.2 Through this SAREX, the following results were achieved:

- a SAR tabletop exercise was conducted for an event, on the limits of the airspaces of Martinique and Barbados, within the framework of the Piarco Search and Rescue Region.
- The SAR coordination procedures for the Piarco RCC, the Pointe à Pitre Aeronautical RSC, the Fort de France Maritime RCC and the Barbados RSC were evaluated.
- The status of SAR agreements in the Eastern Caribbean subregion was evaluated.

5. Conclusions

5.1 The USOAP results objectively show the status of SAR provision in the CAR Region. The latest audits carried out in the Region are an indication of the static or declining trend in the provision of SAR services.

5.2 It is necessary for the decision makers of the Region to be able to have knowledge of the real situation of the provision of SAR services and of the responsibilities that each State has to ensure the operation of the SAR system at a global level.

5.3 The SAR exercise organized by France is a proactive demonstration of the commitment of this State, which should be analysed and replicated by the other States of the CAR Region.

6. Suggested Actions

6.1 The Meeting is invited to:

- a) note of the information provided in this Working Paper;
- b) reiterate the commitment to the provision of SAR services in the CAR Region;
- c) note of the main challenges detailed in Section 3 of this Working Paper and make recommendations to improve the provision of SAR services in the CAR Region; and,
- d) take any additional action deemed necessary.