

## **A-10: INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON MARITIME SEARCH AND RESCUE**

**Name of the convention:** International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue

**Acronym or short name:** SAR

**International organisation in charge of it:** International Maritime Organization (IMO)

**Summary description (in plain language):** The convention was aimed at developing an international SAR plan, so that, no matter where an accident occurs, the rescue of persons in distress at sea will be co-ordinated by a SAR organization and, when necessary, by co-operation between neighbouring SAR organizations.

The technical requirements of the SAR Convention are contained in an Annex, which was divided into five Chapters. Parties to the Convention are required to ensure that arrangements are made for the provision of adequate SAR services in their coastal waters.

Parties are encouraged to enter into SAR agreements with neighbouring States involving the establishment of SAR regions, the pooling of facilities, establishment of common procedures, training and liaison visits. The Convention states that Parties should take measures to expedite entry into its territorial waters of rescue units from other Parties. Parties are encouraged to enter into SAR agreements with neighbouring States involving the establishment of SAR regions, the pooling of facilities, establishment of common procedures, training and liaison visits. The Convention states that Parties should take measures to expedite entry into its territorial waters of rescue units from other Parties.

Parties to the Convention are required to establish ship reporting systems, under which ships report their position to a coast radio station. This enables the interval between the loss of contact with a vessel and the initiation of search operations to be reduced. It also helps to permit the rapid determination of vessels which may be called upon to provide assistance including medical help when required

The 1979 SAR Convention imposed considerable obligations on Parties - such as setting up the shore installations required - and as a result the Convention was not being ratified by as many countries as some other treaties. Equally important, many of the world's coastal States had not accepted the Convention and the obligations it imposed. It was agreed that there were a number of substantial concerns that needed to be taken into account, including:-

- lessons learned from SAR operations;
- experiences of States which had implemented the Convention;
- questions and concerns posed

especially by developing States which were not yet Party to the Convention;- need to further harmonize the IMO and International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) SAR provisions;- inconsistent use of Convention terminology and phraseology.

**Date of first approval:** 27 april 1979

**Date of coming into force:** 22 june 1985

**Dates of revision and Reasons of revisions:**

**The 1998 amendments:** The revised technical Annex of the SAR Convention clarifies the responsibilities of Governments and puts greater emphasis on the regional approach and co-ordination between maritime and aeronautical SAR operations.

The revised Annex includes five Chapters:

- **Chapter 1 - Terms and Definitions:** This Chapter updates the original Chapter 1 of the same name.

- **Chapter 2 - Organization and Co-ordination :** Replaces the 1979 Chapter 2 on Organization. The Chapter has been re-drafted to make the responsibilities of Governments clearer. It requires Parties, either individually or in co-operation with other States, to establish basic elements of a search and rescue service, to include: - Legal framework; - Assignment of a responsible authority ; - Organization of available resources ; - Communication facilities ; - Co-ordination and operational functions ; - Processes to improve the service including planning, domestic and international co-operative relationships and training.

Parties should establish search and rescue regions within each sea area - with the agreement of the Parties concerned. Parties then accept responsibility for providing search and rescue services for a specified area.

The Chapter also describes how SAR services should be arranged and national capabilities be developed. Parties are required to establish rescue co-ordination centres and to operate them on a 24-hour basis with trained staff who have a working knowledge of English.

Parties are also required to "ensure the closest practicable co-ordination between maritime and aeronautical services".

- **Chapter 3 - Co-operation between States :** Replaces the original Chapter 3 on Co-operation. Requires Parties to co-ordinate search and rescue organizations, and, where necessary, search and rescue operations with those of neighbouring States. The Chapter states that unless otherwise agreed between the States concerned, a Party should authorize, subject to applicable national laws, rules and regulations, immediate entry into or over its territorial sea or territory for

rescue units of other Parties solely for the purpose of search and rescue.

- **Chapter 4 - Operating Procedures** :Incorporates the previous Chapters 4 (Preparatory Measures) and 5 (Operating Procedures).The Chapter says that each RCC (Rescue Co-ordination Centre) and RSC (Rescue Sub-Centre) should have up-to-date information on search and rescue facilities and communications in the area and should have detailed plans for conduct of search and rescue operations. Parties - individually or in co-operation with others should be capable of receiving distress alerts on a 24-hour basis. The regulations include procedures to be followed during an emergency and state that search and rescue activities should be co-ordinated on scene for the most effective results. The Chapter says that "Search and rescue operations shall continue, when practicable, until all reasonable hope of rescuing survivors has passed".

- **Chapter 5 - Ship reporting systems**:Includes recommendations on establishing ship reporting systems for search and rescue purposes, noting that existing ship reporting systems could provide adequate information for search and rescue purposes in a given area.

**Applicability (situation of ratification)**: The convention shall enter into force 12 months after the date on which 15 states have become Parties to it in accordance with article IV (art.V).

**Stakes for ports**:Ports "are able to participate in search and rescue operations" may deem as rescue units (Annex, Chapter 2, 2.4.1): so "appropriate public or private services" are considered as a rescue unit according to the convention.

Ports"responsible authorities" can be responsible for the co-ordination of assistance when there is a person or ship in distress at sea in an "area within a Party provides for the overall co-ordination of search and rescue operations" (Annex, Chapter 2, 2.1.9).

**Links with other conventions**: [SOLAS](#) (recommendation 40), [UNCLOS](#), Resolution A 949 (23), Guidelines on places of refuge for ships in need of assistance

**Key-words**: maritime search and rescue, assistance, rescue co-ordination centre, rescue sub-centre, emergency phase, distress phase, ship reporting systems

**Internet hyperlink with other website**:

<http://www.imo.org/>

(full text) <http://www.admiraltylawguide.com/conven/searchrescue1979.html>

