



International Civil Aviation Organization

Sixth Meeting of the Asia Pacific Regional Aviation Safety Team (APRAST/6)

(Bangkok, Thailand, 6 – 10 April 2015)

**Agenda Item 4: Update, discussion and review of APRAST activities**

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY RELATED TO NON-ROUTINE AND EMERGENCY EVENTS**

*(Presented by the Secretariat)*

**SUMMARY**

This WP provides information from the Asia/Pacific Regional Search and Rescue Task Force (APSAR/TF) that relates to English language proficiency issues of possible interest to the APRAST.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The Third Meeting of the Asia/Pacific Regional Search and Rescue Task Force (APSAR/TF/3) was held during 25 – 29 January 2015 at the Maldives.

1.2 One of the key tasks of the APSAR/TF/3 was to conduct an early analysis of lessons learnt from the disappearance of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 (MH370) on 08 March 2014, while flying from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to Beijing, China with 239 people on board. Indonesia also provided initial information regarding the Air Traffic Control (ATC) and SAR operation for Air Asia QZ 8501, which lost contact with ATC on 28 December 2014.

**2. DISCUSSION**

2.1 Malaysia presented WP06, which provided information on *MH370 Search and Rescue Operations and Lessons Learnt*. ICAO also presented WP05, *ICAO Brief on the SAR Response to MH370*. The following passages from the APSAR/TF/3 report are highlighted in part where the transfer of information was problematic.

2.2 *Malaysia commented that the Kuala Lumpur Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) did not have dedicated SAR officers, but utilised SAR-trained air traffic controllers. APSAR/TF/3 agreed that this may not be optimal, as SAR was an increasingly specialised task that required expert knowledge. In addition, Malaysia stated that lack of English proficiency between RCCs played a part in the difficulty of understanding information that was being conveyed, especially to the Ho Chi Minh RCC.*

2.3 *The meeting noted the following issues as being possible lessons learnt that could be incorporated into the Asia/Pacific SAR Plan.*

- a) *The time lapses of more than 16 minutes between the transfer of control point at IGARI and the advisory to Kuala Lumpur ACC that MH370 had disappeared, 38 minutes for the declaration of an INCERFA SAR phase and 7 hours and 21 minutes for the declaration of an ALERFA/DETRESFA SAR phase by Viet Nam indicates that there was a need to divert more resources and/or urgency in the ATC response.*

- b) *It is apparent that a higher degree of civil/military coordination may have revealed the MH370 course reversal much earlier, and as the track also crossed Thailand's PSR coverage, advice to Thailand may have also proved beneficial. Considerable time had been lost in the initial search, partly due to poor civil/military cooperation.*
- c) *Annex 11 and 12 SAR phases and actions needed to be revised (reference in here from Annex 11 and Annex 12 Section 5.2 referred) to take into account the expectations and capabilities of an ATS surveillance environment, the need for civil/military coordination where appropriate, and advisories to all neighbouring ACCs in the case of uncertainty of the aircraft's track.*
- d) *Poor SAR preparedness and ad hoc SAR coordination between States, including the intervention by political decision-makers needs to be addressed if an optimal operational response was that it was difficult to reconcile the primary radar trace with an airliner's capability, adding further doubt at the time.*

2.4 *Malaysia commented that the delay in the activation of the Kuala Lumpur ARCC was partially due to conflicting reports received from Malaysian Airlines (MAS) that the aircraft was still flying, based on their flight tracking system and reports on the media indicating that MH370 had landed safely in Nanning airport in Southern China. Upon further investigation, this information was found to be baseless and inaccurate, so time was wasted pursuing these unfounded reports.*

2.5 *Due to the uncertainties surrounding the information received from the Royal Malaysian Air Force, it was decided that both areas to the west and east of Peninsular Malaysia would be searched, and a large number of assets, aircraft and vessels were deployed to search these areas.*

2.6 While some of the communications difficulties were a matter of insufficient or just incorrect information, the APSAR/TF noted that the uncertainty and poor response times were also affected by English language proficiency in trying to convey clear information to describe the unfolding non-routine event.

2.7 The following is an extract from the draft Asia/Pacific SAR Plan:

7.3 *All States should:*

*h) develop a comprehensive training programme that includes SAR training modules for RCC SAR Coordinators (SCs) based on a competency-based assessment approach to ensure technical and English language proficiency, cyclical (periodic) instruction that provides continuous training to ensure competency is maintained, and a system for maintaining training records; and*

2.8 While the draft provision was considered to be a good step to improving communications efficiency, it does not provide States with guidance on how to achieve a reasonable level of language proficiency for operational fields, particularly during times when there is a non-routine or emergency situation to manage.

2.9 In considering the safety problems that are evident within various contributing bodies to APANPIRG such as the APSAR/TF/3 and Large Height Deviations (LHD) at the 19th Meeting of the Regional Airspace Safety Monitoring Advisory Group (RASMAG/19, Bangkok, Thailand 26 – 30 May 2014), it is evident that English language proficiency is a significant contributor to safety related events, which indicates that States need further support in this area.

**3. ACTION BY THE MEETING**

3.1 The Meeting is invited to:

- a) note the issues related to English proficiency evident in both ATC and SAR services during recent SAR events; and
- b) consider ways of strengthening English proficiency training with a special focus on being able to manage non-routine or emergency events (possibly using high fidelity simulation or special workshop guidance material for operational staff).

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