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INFORMATION PAPER

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**NAM/CAR/SAM Search and Rescue (SAR) Implementation and Civil-military Coordination Meeting
(SAR MTG)**

Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, 25 to 28 October 2016

Agenda Item 1: Global and Regional Search and Rescue (SAR) Matters

MASS RESCUE OPERATIONS (MRO) WORKING GROUP

(Presented by Jamaica)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This information paper presents the background and operational concept of a Mass Rescue Operations Working Group that has been established in Jamaica to address SAR operations in the marine environment of a large enough scale to quickly overwhelm the ability of local resources to effectively address such an incident.

Strategic Objectives:

- Safety
- Air Navigation Capacity and Efficiency

1. Introduction

1.1 Following the tragic events of the Costa Concordia ship wreck off the coast of Italy in January 2012, emergency response providers in Jamaica conducted an analysis of Jamaica's ability to effectively deal with an emergency situation similar to that of the Costa Concordia.

1.2 It was determined from the analysis that the national emergency response mechanism for this type of event had to be strengthened.

1.3 It that regard, a working group was formed in 2014, spearheaded by the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM), with the Maritime Authority of Jamaica and Jamaica Civil Aviation Authority as tier 2 participants. The working group was completed with participation from the Jamaica Defence Force Coast Guard, Port Authority of Jamaica, Norman Manley and Sangster International Airports and the Ministry of Health Jamaica.

1.4 The team developed the following definition of a Mass Rescue Operation (MRO) in the Jamaican context: “A mass rescue operation for the purposes of this plan, is one that involves the need for immediate assistance to large numbers of persons (>200 souls) in distress within the marine environment, where capabilities normally available to search and rescue (SAR) authorities are inadequate.”

1.5 The MRO plan therefore encompasses the vast majority of aviation SAR situations that could possibly occur within the Kingston Flight Information Region.

1.6 The purpose of the plan is to provide for an immediate and coordinated national response to an MRO incident occurring within the Kinston FIR, excluding the Cayman Terminal Control Area (TMA), in order to save lives and property.

1.7 The Kingston Flight Information Region was used as it encompasses the maritime SAR region designated to the Maritime Authority of Jamaica (MAJ) by the International Maritime Organization. Additionally the Jamaica Defence Coast Guard acts as the joint Rescue Coordination Centre for both aviation and maritime SAR events.

2. Completed tasks of the MRO Working Group

2.1 The main tasks completed thus far by the MRO working group are as follows:

- a) Completed draft zero of the MRO national plan
- b) Conducted table top exercises at all major sea and air ports
- c) Conducted functional exercises to test the communication protocols of the national MRO plan at all major sea and air ports

2.2 The plan is currently in a draft zero state meaning that it is a working document and not yet signed off at the ministerial level, however, the protocols and procedures established in the plan have been tested in the table top and functional exercises.

2.2.1 The objectives of the plan are to:

- a) Save lives and property
- b) Protect the marine environment
- c) Establish a clear command structure for the management MRO incidents
- d) Establish an Incident Command Post at a capable port close to the incident
- e) Coordinate the effective response operations of MRO incidents
- f) Designate landing areas for processing survivors and casualties
- g) Outline procedures for media relations
- h) Outline worst case scenarios that can be addressed by this plan

2.3 Table top exercises were conducted at all the major sea and air ports in March 2015, in conjunction with the individual port administrators, local emergency responders such as health, police and fire personnel. Members of the MRO working group were also present to introduce the MRO plan, its procedures as well as physically inspect the facilities and resources available at each port.

2.3.1 Several airlines and cruise ship lines sent representatives from their care teams to provide their perspectives on managing a crisis situation such as an MRO would present.

2.3.2 Personnel from the United States Coast Guard played the role of exercise facilitators during the table top exercises.

2.4 Functional communication exercises were conducted at the same ports in April 2016, with the same set of personnel involved. In this set of exercises actual “call-outs” were made simulating a Mass Rescue incident. The National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) was also stood up to coordinate the communication between the port facility, emergency response agencies, on-scene personnel and the NEOC.

2.5 The United States Coast Guard again played the role of exercise facilitator but also conducted verification tests. For example: if the plan called for an airport to send a rescue boat to the crash site the United States Coast Guard would physically go to the location of the rescue boat, take a picture to verify the boat was physically present and in working condition and send the picture back to the NEOC.

3. Future tasks of the MRO working group

3.1 The next phase of the MRO working group is to accomplish the following tasks:

- 1) Address the deficiencies identified during the functional exercises which included:
 - a) The lack of knowledge of the MRO plan by relevant local emergency response agencies associated with mass emergency situations;
 - b) During the exercise the main form of communication within and between agencies was cellular technology. Despite Jamaica’s robust cellular network in the event of a real MRO emergency these networks will quickly become overwhelmed. Hence the ODPEM has been tasked with establishing a universal communication network that would be used in the event of an MRO; and
 - c) There were no written formal agreements with international partners, who would have to be called upon in the likely event of assistance being sought to address the overwhelming nature of an MRO event.
- 2) Make the necessary amendments to the MRO plan and get the necessary ministerial sign off

4. Conclusion

4.1 States are invited to take note of the following:

- a) The status of Mass Rescue Operations plans developed by Jamaica;
- b) Participate as observers in future MRO exercises conducted by Jamaica; and
- c) Neighbouring States are invited to participate in the negotiation and sign-off of bilateral SAR/MRO agreements with Jamaica.

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