



WORKING PAPER

ASSEMBLY — 42ND SESSION

TECHNICAL COMMISSION

Agenda Item 24: Aviation Safety and Air Navigation Priority Initiatives

SEARCH AND RESCUE ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

(Presented by the United Arab Emirates)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Search and rescue agreements are vital for enabling timely cross border emergency response and are a key element of ICAO Annex 12 — *Search and Rescue*. However, many States face difficulties in formalizing these agreements due to legal complexities, sovereignty matters, and the need for more regional support.

This paper highlights the impact of these challenges on compliance and proposes that ICAO reclassify the requirement for written search and rescue (SAR) agreements in Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP) guidance from an implied standard to a recommendation. This would allow States to demonstrate SAR readiness through alternative evidence, while maintaining alignment with the safety objectives of Annex 12.

Action: The Assembly is invited to:

- a) recognize the difficulty faced by some States in concluding SAR agreements;
- b) direct the relevant ICAO technical working group to develop guidance or frameworks to facilitate and simplify the conclusion of bilateral or multilateral SAR agreements, including procedures for temporary cross-border SAR operations; and
- c) consider the reclassification of the requirement for written SAR agreements with neighbouring States from a de facto “*Standard*” to a “*Recommendation*” in the context of USOAP audits (specifically regarding evidence for Protocol Question (PQ) 7.517 and update the associated guidance for PQ 7.517.

<i>Strategic Goals:</i>	This working paper relates to <i>Every Flight is Safe and Secure</i> .
<i>Financial implications:</i>	This working paper has no financial implications.
<i>References:</i>	Annex 12 — <i>Search and Rescue</i> Doc 9731, <i>International Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue (IAMSAR) Manual</i> Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Annex 12 — *Search and Rescue*, Chapter 3, 3.1.1 states that “Contracting States shall coordinate their search and rescue organizations with those of neighbouring States.” Such coordination is vital for timely and effective cross border emergency response, ensuring the safety of passengers and crew in distress.

1.2 ICAO’s Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP) Continuous Monitoring Approach (CMA), Protocol Question (PQ) 7.517, assesses this requirement by seeking evidence of coordination, typically in the form of formal written bilateral search and rescue (SAR) Letters of Agreement between neighbouring States.

1.3 However, some States face complex political circumstances that prevent them from securing such agreements despite being willing and operationally prepared to cooperate. For instance, geopolitical tensions, lack of diplomatic recognition, or stalled bilateral processes may obstruct formalization, even when practical SAR coordination is functioning.

1.4 Challenges related to the formalization of SAR coordination agreements continue to affect some States, despite demonstrated willingness and operational capability to cooperate. To address this, the paper proposes a refinement in ICAO’s approach by reclassifying the requirement for written SAR agreements in the context of PQ 7.517 from an implied standard to a recommendation. This change would allow States to provide alternative evidence of effective coordination, ensuring fair and context-sensitive safety oversight assessments without compromising the intent of Annex 12.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Effective cross-border SAR coordination is essential to ensure timely and efficient emergency response. Where formal agreements are not in place, operational delays and procedural uncertainty may arise, potentially impacting aviation safety outcomes.

2.2 The current implementation of PQ 7.517 places emphasis on the existence of signed SAR agreements as the primary evidence of compliance. However, in certain regions, political sensitivities and diplomatic complexities have made formalization of such agreements particularly challenging. As of 2016, only 23 per cent of Asia/Pacific States were found compliant with PQ 7.517, and in the Middle East (MID) Region, approximately 62 per cent of planned SAR arrangements had been signed by 2025 — despite demonstrable cooperation in practice.

2.3 In such contexts, the absence of formal agreements may not accurately reflect the State’s SAR readiness or willingness to collaborate. To ensure a more balanced and context-sensitive approach, ICAO could consider allowing alternative forms of evidence, such as:

- a) established procedures for the entry of foreign SAR aircraft;
- b) national SAR plans identifying designated points of contact and Rescue Coordination Centres (RCCs);
- c) records of regional SAR coordination exercises or meetings; and

- d) correspondence or documentation reflecting ongoing efforts to reach formal agreements.

2.4 The United Arab Emirates believe that accepting such evidence would align with the intent of Annex 12, support fair and accurate assessments under USOAP, and promote constructive regional collaboration where formal agreements remain under negotiation.

3. **CONCLUSION:**

3.1 While Annex 12 promotes the coordination of search and rescue services among neighbouring States, some States continue to encounter challenges in concluding formal agreements due to inter-State factors such as differing legal frameworks or limitations in bilateral engagement. To support effective implementation and strengthen global SAR capabilities, greater flexibility in demonstrating compliance may be necessary.

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