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DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

USAID/OFDA Supports Regional Simulation Exercise



Participants in the SIMEX event in Chile.

Photo courtesy of Víctor Antrio, Bomberos Osorno.

USAID/OFDA is strengthening urban search-and-rescue (USAR) capacity in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region by providing \$100,000 to support the 2015 Regional Earthquake Response Simulation Exercise (SIMEX 2015) in Santiago, Chile, on September 22-26.

Led by the UN International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG), SIMEX focuses on practicing disaster response methodologies that are based on INSARAG standards and guidelines. This includes coordination between USAR teams, assessment of the affected area and applying search techniques, locating and carrying out rescue activities in collapsed structures, and testing the coordination of the USAR cluster, all by applying INSARAG signaling tools and documents as well as communicating with the local population.

SIMEX 2015 is organized by INSARAG and the National Emergency Office of Chile (ONEMI) with the purpose of improving coordination of an international response to earthquakes. The simulation involves an international disaster in a real-life scenario, with participation from the national humanitarian network and other humanitarian partners present in the country.

The organization of the event included an international planning team and a national-level counterpart. At the national level, ONEMI receives support from Ministries of the Interior and Public Safety, Foreign Affairs, Health, and Defense, as well as Chilean police and firefighters. Internationally, the exercise is coordinated by INSARAG and OCHA, with participation from the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC), international USAR teams, and foreign medical teams organized by the UN World Health Organization and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

In 2015, Chile assumed the temporary presidency of INSARAG Americas and proposed to carry out SIMEX 2015, hoping to share lessons learned and progress made to date and identify areas for improvement.

The capacity to face urban risk within countries and between neighboring countries must be standardized and agreed upon through formal understandings that are shared and demonstrated to enable countries to effectively cooperate during a response. To this end, the main purpose of SIMEX 2015 is to validate response procedures and

mechanisms at a national and international level to respond to a large-scale earthquake scenario in Chile.

The exercise will have two stages simulating the response to a catastrophic earthquake in the Metropolitan region of Chile. In the first stage, only national USAR teams participate. In the second stage, the national teams are joined by international USAR teams.

The exercise aims to evaluate procedures and protocols between national and international response agencies; practice procedures and assess protocols for activation, reception, and coordination of international assistance; and share new INSARAG guidelines.

USAID/OFDA is one of the strategic partners that support ONEMI and the Chilean National Firefighter Corps to strengthen their National Search and Rescue System. Through technical assistance and capacity development, USAR teams are able to strengthen the coordination between institutions to provide the country with a more self-sufficient USAR response.

"Building capacity is crucial given the seismic risks that are present in this region," commented Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan. "The earthquake and tsunami on September 16 not only reminded us of the risks, but highlighted the lifesaving value of preparation."

U.S. Ambassador to Chile Mike Hammer, USAID/OFDA Disaster Operations Specialist Peter Schecter, and other USAID/OFDA staff.



Photo by Christopher Nyce, USAID/Chile.