

International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue, 1979
(Hamburg, 27 April 1979)
Entry into force: 22 June 1985

**INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON MARITIME SEARCH AND
RESCUE, 1979**

THE PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION,

NOTING the great importance attached in several conventions to the rendering of assistance to persons in distress at sea and to the establishment by every coastal State of adequate and effective arrangements for coast watching and for search and rescue services,

HAVING CONSIDERED Recommendation 40 adopted by the International Conference on Safety of Life at Sea, 1960, which recognizes the desirability of co-ordinating activities regarding safety on and over the sea among a number of inter-governmental organizations,

DESIRING to develop and promote these activities by establishing an international maritime search and rescue plan responsible to the needs of maritime traffic for the rescue of persons in distress at sea,

WISHING to promote co-operation among search and rescue organizations around the world and among those participating in search and rescue operations at sea.

HAVE AGREED as follows:

Article I

General obligations under the Convention

The Parties undertake to adopt all legislative or other appropriate measures necessary to give full effect to the Convention and its Annex, which is an integral part of the Convention. Unless expressly provided otherwise, a reference to the Convention constitutes at the same time a reference to its Annex.

Article II

Other treaties and interpretation

1. Nothing in the Convention shall prejudice the codification and development of the law of the sea by the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea convened pursuant to resolution 2750(XXV) of the General Assembly of the

United Nations nor the present or future claims and legal views of any State concerning the law of the sea and the nature and extent of coastal and flag State jurisdiction.

2. No provision of the Convention shall be construed as prejudicing obligations or rights of vessels provided for in other international instruments.

Article III

Amendments

1. The Convention may be amended by either of the procedures specified in paragraphs 2 and 3 hereinafter.

2. Amendment after consideration within the Inter-Governmental Maritime Consultative Organization (hereinafter referred to as the Organization):

(a) Any amendment proposed by a Party and transmitted to the Secretary-General of the Organization (hereinafter referred to as the Secretary-General), or any amendment deemed necessary by the Secretary-General as a result of an amendment to a corresponding provision of Annex 12 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation, shall be circulated to all Members of the Organization and all Parties at least six months prior to its consideration by the Maritime Safety Committee of the Organization.

(b) Parties, whether or not Members of the Organization, shall be entitled to participate in the proceedings of the Maritime Safety Committee for the consideration and adoption of amendments.

(c) Amendments shall be adopted by a two-thirds majority of the Parties present and voting in the Maritime Safety Committee on condition that at least one third of the Parties shall be present at the time of adoption of the amendment.

(d) Amendments adopted in accordance with sub-paragraph (c) shall be communicated by the Secretary-General to all Parties for acceptance.

(e) An amendment to an Article or to paragraphs 2.1.4, 2.1.5, 2.1.7, 2.1.10, 3.1.2 or 3.1.3 of the Annex shall be deemed to have been accepted on the date on which the Secretary-General has received an instrument of acceptance from two thirds of the Parties.

(f) An amendment to the Annex other than to paragraphs 2.1.4, 2.1.5, 2.1.7, 2.1.10, 3.1.2 or 3.1.3 shall be deemed to have been accepted at the end of

one year from the date on which it is communicated to the Parties for acceptance. However, if within such period of one year more than one third of the Parties notify the Secretary-General that they object to the amendment, it shall be deemed not to have been accepted.

(g) An amendment to an Article or to paragraphs 2.1.4, 2.1.5, 2.1.7, 2.1.10, 3.1.2 or 3.1.3 of the Annex shall enter into force:

(i) with respect to those Parties which have accepted it, six months after the date on which it is deemed to have been accepted;

(ii) with respect to those Parties which accept it after the condition mentioned in sub-paragraph (e) has been met and before the amendment enters into force, on the date of entry into force of the amendment;

(iii) with respect to those Parties which accept it after the date on which the amendment enters into force, 30 days after the deposit of an instrument of acceptance.

(h) An amendment to the Annex other than to paragraphs 2.1.4, 2.1.5, 2.1.7, 2.1.10, 3.1.2 or 3.1.3 shall enter into force with respect to all Parties, except those which have objected to the amendment under sub-paragraph (f) and which have not withdrawn such objections, six months after the date on which it is deemed to have been accepted. However, before the date set for entry into force, any Party may give notice to the Secretary-General that it exempts itself from giving effect to that amendment for a period not longer than one year from the date of its entry into force, or for such longer period as may be determined by a two-thirds majority of the Parties present and voting in the Maritime Safety Committee at the time of the adoption of the amendment.

3. Amendment by a conference:

(a) Upon the request of a Party concurred in by at least one third of the Parties, the Organization shall convene a conference of Parties to consider amendments to the Convention. Proposed amendments shall be circulated by the Secretary-General to all Parties at least six months prior to their consideration by the conference.

(b) Amendments shall be adopted by such a conference by a two-thirds majority of the Parties present and voting, on condition that at least one third of the Parties shall be present at the time of adoption of the amendment.

Amendments so adopted shall be communicated by the Secretary-General to all Parties for acceptance.

(c) Unless the conference decides otherwise, the amendment shall be deemed to have been accepted and shall enter into force in accordance with the procedures specified in sub-paragraphs 2(e), 2(f), 2(g) and 2(h) respectively, provided that reference in sub-paragraph 2(h) to the Maritime Safety Committee expanded in accordance with sub-paragraph 2(b) shall be taken to mean reference to the conference.

4. Any declaration of acceptance of, or objection to, an amendment or any notice given under sub-paragraph 2(h) shall be submitted in writing to the Secretary-General who shall inform all Parties of any such submission and the date of its receipt.

5. The Secretary-General shall inform States of any amendments which enter into force, together with the date on which each such amendment enters into force.

Article IV

Signature, ratification, acceptance approval and accession

1. The Convention shall remain open for signature at the Headquarters of the Organization from 1 November 1979 until 31 October 1980 and shall thereafter remain open for accession. States may become Parties to the Convention by:

- (a) signature without reservation as to ratification, acceptance or approval; or
- (b) signature subject to ratification, acceptance or approval, followed by ratification, acceptance or approval; or
- (c) accession.[\[1\]](#)

2. Ratification, acceptance, approval or accession shall be effected by the deposit of an instrument to that effect with the Secretary-General.

3. The Secretary-General shall inform States of any signature or of the deposit of any instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession and the date of its deposit.

Article V

Entry into force

1. 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.[\[2\]](#)

2. Entry into force for States which ratify, accept, approve or accede to the Convention in accordance with Article IV after the condition prescribed in paragraph 1 has been met and before the Convention enters into force, shall be on the date of entry into force of the Convention.

3. Entry into force for States which ratify, accept, approve or accede to the Convention after the date on which the Convention enters into force shall be 30 days after the date of deposit of an instrument in accordance with Article IV.

4. Any instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession deposited after the date of entry into force of an amendment to the Convention in accordance with Article III shall apply to Convention, as amended, and the Convention, as amended, shall enter into force for a State depositing such an instrument 30 days after the date of its deposit.

5. The Secretary-General shall inform States of the date of entry into force of the Convention.

Article VI

Denunciation

1. The Convention may be denounced by any Party at any time after the expiry of five years from the date on which the Convention enters into force for that Party.

2. Denunciation shall be effected by the deposit of an instrument of denunciation with the Secretary-General who shall notify States of any instrument of denunciation received and of the date of its receipt as well as the date on which such denunciation takes effect.

3. A denunciation shall take effect one year, or such longer period as may be specified in the instrument of denunciation, after its receipt by the Secretary-General.

Article VII

Deposit and registration

1. The Convention shall be deposited with the Secretary-General who shall transmit certified true copies thereof to States.

2. As soon as the Convention enters into force, the Secretary-General shall transmit the text thereof to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for

registration and publication, in accordance with Article 102 of the Charter of the United Nations.

Article VIII
Languages

The Convention is established in a single copy in the Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish languages, each text being equally authentic. Official translations in the Arabic, German and Italian languages shall be prepared and deposited with the signed original.

DONE AT HAMBURG this twenty-seventh day of April one thousand nine hundred and seventy-nine.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF the undersigned, being duly authorized by their respective Governments for the purpose, have signed the Convention.

[Signatures not reproduced here.]

ANNEX

CHAPTER 1

TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

1.1 "Shall" is used in the Annex to indicate a provision, the uniform application of which by all Parties is required in the interest of safety of life at sea.

1.2 "Should" is used in the Annex to indicate a provision, the uniform application of which by all Parties is recommended in the interest of safety of life at sea.

1.3 The terms listed below are used in the Annex with the following meanings:

.1 "Search and rescue region". An area of defined dimensions within which search and rescue services are provided.

.2 "Rescue co-ordination centre". A unit responsible for promoting efficient organization of search and rescue services and for co-ordinating the conduct of search and rescue operations within a search and rescue region.

.3 "Rescue sub-centre". A unit subordinate to a rescue co-ordination centre established to complement the latter within a specified area within a search and rescue region.

.4 "Coast watching unit". A land unit, stationary or mobile, designated to maintain a watch on the safety of vessels in coastal areas.

- .5 "Rescue unit". A unit composed of trained personnel and provided with equipment suitable for the expeditious conduct of search and rescue operations.
- .6 "On-scene commander". The commander of a rescue unit designated to co-ordinate search and rescue operations within a specified search area.
- .7 "Co-ordinator surface search". A vessel, other than a rescue unit, designated to co-ordinate surface search and rescue operations within a specified search area.
- .8 "Emergency phase". A generic term meaning, as the case may be, uncertainty phase, alert phase or distress phase.
- .9 "Uncertainty phase". A situation wherein uncertainty exists as to the safety of a vessel and the persons on board.
- .10 "Alert phase". A situation wherein apprehension exists as to the safety of a vessel and of the persons on board.
- .11 "Distress phase". A situation wherein there is a reasonable certainty that a vessel or a person is threatened by grave and imminent danger and requires immediate assistance.
- .12 "To ditch". In the case of an aircraft, to make a forced landing on water.

CHAPTER 2 ORGANIZATION

- 2.1 Arrangements for provision and co-ordination of search and rescue services
- 2.1.1 Parties shall ensure that necessary arrangements are made for the provision of adequate search and rescue services for persons in distress at sea round their coasts.
- 2.1.2 Parties shall forward to the Secretary-General information on their search and rescue organization and later alterations of importance, including:
- .1 national maritime search and rescue services;
 - .2 location of established rescue co-ordination centres, their telephone and telex numbers and areas of responsibility; and
 - .3 principal available rescue units at their disposal.
- 2.1.3 The Secretary-General shall in a suitable way transmit to all Parties the information referred to in paragraph 2.1.2.

2.1.4 Each search and rescue region shall be established by agreement among Parties concerned. The Secretary-General shall be notified of such agreement.

2.1.5 In case agreement on the exact dimensions of a search and rescue region is not reached by the Parties concerned, those Parties shall use their best endeavours to reach agreement upon appropriate arrangements under which the equivalent overall co-ordination of search and rescue services is provided in the area. The Secretary-General shall be notified of such arrangements.

2.1.6 The Secretary-General shall notify all Parties of the agreements or arrangements referred to in paragraphs 2.1.4 and 2.1.5.

2.1.7 The delimitation of search and rescue regions is not related to and shall not prejudice the delimitation of any boundary between States.

2.1.8 Parties should arrange that their search and rescue services are able to give prompt response to distress calls.

2.1.9 On receiving information that a person is in distress at sea in an area within which a Party provides for the overall co-ordination of search and rescue operations, the responsible authorities of that Party shall take urgent steps to provide the most appropriate assistance available.

2.1.10 Parties shall ensure that assistance be provided to any person in distress at sea. They shall do so regardless of the nationality or status of such a person or the circumstances in which that person is found.

2.2 Co-ordination of search and rescue facilities

2.2.1 Parties shall make provision for the co-ordination of the facilities required to provide search and rescue services round their coasts.

2.2.2 Parties shall establish a national machinery for the overall co-ordination of search and rescue services.

2.3 Establishment of rescue co-ordination centres and rescue sub-centres

2.3.1 To meet the requirements of paragraphs 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 Parties shall establish rescue co-ordination centres for their search and rescue services and such rescue sub-centres as they consider appropriate.

2.3.2 The competent authorities of each Party shall determine the area for which a rescue sub-centre is responsible.

2.3.3. Each rescue co-ordination centre and rescue sub-centre established in accordance with paragraph 2.3.1 shall have adequate means for the receipt of distress communications via a coast radio station or otherwise. Every such centre and sub-centre shall also have adequate means for communication with its rescue units and with rescue co-ordination centres or rescue sub-centres, as appropriate, in adjacent areas.

2.4 Designation of rescue units

2.4.1 Parties shall designate either:

.1 as rescue units, State or other appropriate public or private services suitably located and equipped, or parts thereof; or

.2 as elements of the search and rescue organization, State or other appropriate public or private services or parts thereof, not suitable for designation as rescue units, but which are able to participate in search and rescue operations, and shall define the functions of those elements.

2.5 Facilities and equipment of rescue units

2.5.1 Each rescue unit shall be provided with facilities and equipment appropriate to its task.

2.5.2 Each rescue unit should have rapid and reliable means of communication with other units or elements engaged in the same operation.

2.5.3 Containers or packages containing survival equipment for dropping to survivors should have the general nature of their contents indicated by a colour code in accordance with paragraph 2.5.4 and by printed indication and self-explanatory symbols, to the extent that such symbols exist.

2.5.4 The colour identification of the contents of droppable containers and packages containing survival equipment should take the form of streamers coloured according to the following code:

.1 Red - medical supplies and first aid equipment;

.2 Blue - food and water;

.3 Yellow - blankets and protective clothing; and

.4 Black - miscellaneous equipment such as stoves, axes, compasses and cooking utensils.

2.5.5 Where supplies of a mixed nature are dropped in one container or package, the colour code should be used in combination.

2.5.6 Instructions on the use of the survival equipment should be enclosed in each of the droppable containers or packages. They should be printed in English and in at least two other languages.

CHAPTER 3 CO-OPERATION

3.1 Co-operation between States

3.1.1 Parties shall co-ordinate their search and rescue organizations and should, whenever necessary, co-ordinate search and rescue operations with those of neighbouring States.

3.1.2 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 of rescue units of other Parties solely for the purpose of searching for the position of maritime casualties and rescuing the survivors of such casualties. In such cases, search and rescue operations shall, as far as practicable, be co-ordinated by the appropriate rescue co-ordination centre of the Party which has authorized entry, or such other authority as has been designated by that Party.

3.1.3 Unless otherwise agreed between the States concerned, the authorities of a Party which wishes its rescue units to enter into or over the territorial sea or territory of another Party solely for the purpose of searching for the position of maritime casualties and rescuing the survivors of such casualties, shall transmit a request, giving full details of the projected mission and the need for it, to the rescue co-ordination centre of that other Party, or to such other authority as has been designated by that Party.

3.1.4 The competent authorities of Parties shall:

- .1 immediately acknowledge the receipt of such a request; and
- .2 as soon as possible indicate the conditions, if any, under which the projected mission may be undertaken.

3.1.5 Parties should enter into agreements with neighbouring States setting forth the conditions for entry of each other's rescue units into or over their respective territorial sea or territory. These agreements should also provide for expediting entry of such units with the least possible formalities.

3.1.6 Each Party should authorize its rescue co-ordination centres:

.1 to request from other rescue co-ordination centres such assistance, including vessels, aircraft, personnel or equipment, as may be needed;

.2 to grant any necessary permission for the entry of such vessels, aircraft, personnel or equipment into or over its territorial sea or territory; and

.3 to make the necessary arrangements with the appropriate customs, immigration or other authorities with a view to expediting such entry.

3.1.7 Each Party should authorize its rescue co-ordination centres to provide, when requested, assistance to other rescue co-ordination centres, including assistance in the form of vessels, aircraft, personnel or equipment.

3.1.8 Parties should enter into search and rescue agreements with neighbouring States regarding the pooling of facilities, establishment of common procedures, conduct of joint training and exercises, regular checks of inter-State communication channels, liaison visits by rescue co-ordination centre personnel and the exchange of search and rescue information.

3.2 Co-ordination with aeronautical services

3.2.1 Parties shall ensure the closest practicable co-ordination between maritime and aeronautical services so as to provide for the most effective and efficient search and rescue services in and over their search and rescue regions.

3.2.2 Whenever practicable, each Party should establish joint rescue co-ordination centres and rescue sub-centres to serve both maritime and aeronautical purposes.

3.2.3 Whenever separate maritime and aeronautical rescue co-ordination centres or rescue sub-centres are established to serve the same area, the Party concerned shall ensure the closest practicable co-ordination between the centres or sub-centres.

3.2.4 Parties shall ensure as far as is possible the use of common procedures by rescue units established for maritime purposes and those established for aeronautical purposes.

CHAPTER 4

PREPARATORY MEASURES

4.1 Requirements for information

4.1.1 Each rescue co-ordination centre and rescue sub-centre shall have available up-to-date information relevant to search and rescue operations in its area including information regarding:

- .1 rescue units and coast watching units;
- .2 any other public and private resources, including transportation facilities and fuel supplies, that are likely to be useful in search and rescue operations;
- .3 means of communication that may be used in search and rescue operations;
- .4 names, cable and telex addresses, telephone and telex numbers of shipping agents, consular authorities, international organizations and other agencies who may be able to assist in obtaining vital information on vessels;
- .5 the locations, call signs or maritime mobile service identities, hours of watch and frequencies of all radio stations likely to be employed in search and rescue operations;
- .6 the locations, call signs or maritime mobile service identities, hours of watch and frequencies of all coast radio stations disseminating meteorological forecasts and warnings for the search and rescue region;
- .7 the locations and hours of watch of services keeping radio watch and the frequencies guarded;
- .8 objects likely to be mistaken for unlocated or unreported wreckage; and
- .9 locations where supplies of droppable emergency survival equipment are stored.

4.1.2 Each rescue co-ordination centre and rescue sub-centre should have ready access to information regarding the position, course, speed and call sign or ship station identity of vessels within its area which may be able to provide assistance to vessels or persons in distress at sea. This information shall either be kept in the rescue co-ordination centre or be readily obtainable when necessary.

4.1.3 A large-scale map shall be provided at each rescue co-ordination centre and rescue sub-centre for the purpose of displaying and plotting information relevant to search and rescue operations in its area.

4.2 Operating plans or instructions

4.2.1 Each rescue co-ordination centre and rescue sub-centre shall prepare or have available detailed plans or instructions for the conduct of search and rescue operations in its area.

4.2.2. The plans or instructions shall specify arrangements for the servicing and refuelling, to the extent possible, of vessels, aircraft and vehicles employed in search and rescue operations, including those made available by other States.

4.2.3 The plans or instructions should contain details regarding action to be taken by those engaged in search and rescue operations in the area, including:

- .1 the manner in which search and rescue operations are to be conducted;
- .2 the use of available communications systems and facilities;
- .3 the action to be taken jointly with other rescue co-ordination centres or rescue sub-centres, as appropriate;
- .4 the methods of altering vessels at sea and en route aircraft;
- .5 the duties and authority of personnel assigned to search and rescue operations;
- .6 possible redeployment of equipment that may be necessitated by meteorological or other conditions;
- .7 the methods of obtaining essential information relevant to search and rescue operations, such as appropriate notices to mariners and reports and forecasts of weather and sea surface conditions;
- .8 the methods of obtaining from other rescue co-ordination centres or rescue sub-centres, as appropriate, such assistance as may be needed, including vessels, aircraft, personnel and equipment;
- .9 the methods of assisting rescue vessels or other vessels to rendezvous with vessels in distress; and
- .10 the methods of assisting distressed aircraft compelled to ditch to rendezvous with surface craft.

4.3 Preparedness of rescue units

4.3.1 Each designated rescue unit shall maintain a state of preparedness commensurate with its task and should keep the appropriate rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre informed of its state of preparedness.

CHAPTER 5 OPERATING PROCEDURES

5.1 Information concerning emergencies

5.1.1 Parties shall ensure that such continuous radio watches as are deemed practicable and necessary, are maintained on international distress frequencies. A coast radio station receiving any distress call or message shall:

- .1 immediately inform the appropriate rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre;
- .2 rebroadcast to the extent necessary to inform ships on one or more of the international distress frequencies or on any other appropriate frequency;
- .3 precede such rebroadcasts with the appropriate automatic alarm signals unless this has already been done; and
- .4 take such subsequent action as decided by the competent authority.

5.1.2 Any authority or element of the search and rescue organization having reason to believe that a vessel is in a state of emergency should give as soon as possible all available information to the rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre concerned.

5.1.3 Rescue co-ordination centres and rescue sub-centres shall, immediately upon receipt of information concerning a vessel in a state of emergency, evaluate such information and determine the phase of emergency in accordance with paragraph 5.2 and the extent of operation required.

5.2 Emergency phases

5.2.1 For operations purposes, the following emergency phases shall be distinguished:

.1 Uncertainty phase:

- .1.1 when a vessel has been reported overdue at its destination; or
- .1.2 when a vessel has failed to make an expected position or safety report.

.2 Alert phase:

- .2.1 when, following the uncertainty phase, attempts to establish contact with the vessel have failed and inquiries addressed to other appropriate sources have been unsuccessful; or

.2.2 when information has been received indicating that the operating efficiency of a vessel is impaired but not to the extent that a distress situation is likely.

.3 Distress phase:

.3.1 when positive information is received that a vessel or a person is in grave and imminent danger and in need of immediate assistance; or

.3.2 when, following the alert phase, further unsuccessful attempts to establish contact with the vessel and more widespread unsuccessful inquiries point to the probability that the vessel is in distress; or

.3.3 when information is received which indicates that the operating efficiency of a vessel has been impaired to the extent that a distress situation is likely.

5.3 Procedures for rescue co-ordination centres and rescue sub-centres during emergency phases

5.3.1 Upon the declaration of the uncertainty phase, the rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre, as appropriate, shall initiate inquiries in order to determine the safety of the vessel or shall declare the alert phase.

5.3.2 Upon the declaration of the alert phase, the rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre, as appropriate, shall extend the inquiries for the missing vessel, alert appropriate search and rescue services and initiate such action, as described in paragraph 5.3.3, as is necessary in the light of the circumstances of the particular case.

5.3.3 Upon the declaration of the distress phase, the rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre, as appropriate, shall:

.1 initiate action in accordance with the arrangements set out in paragraph 4.2;

.2 where appropriate, estimate the degree of uncertainty of the vessel's position and determine the extent of any area to be searched;

.3 notify the owner of the vessel or his agent if possible and keep him informed of developments;

.4 notify other rescue co-ordination centres or rescue sub-centres, the help of which seems likely to be required or which may be concerned in the operation;

.5 request at an early stage any help which might be available from aircraft, vessels or services not specifically included in the search and rescue organization, considering that, in the majority of distress situations in ocean areas, other vessels in the vicinity are important elements for search and rescue operations;

.6 draw up a broad plan for the conduct of the operations from the information available and communicate such plan to the authorities designated in accordance with paragraphs 5.7 and 5.8 for their guidance;

.7 amend as necessary in the light of circumstances the guidance already given in paragraph 5.3.3.6;

.8 notify the consular or diplomatic authorities concerned or, if the incident involves a refugee or displaced person, the office of the competent international organization;

.9 notify accident investigation authorities as appropriate; and

.10 notify any aircraft, vessel or other services mentioned in paragraph 5.3.3.5 in consultation with the authorities designated in accordance with paragraph 5.7 or 5.8, as appropriate, when their assistance is no longer required.

5.3.4 Initiation of search and rescue operations in respect of a vessel whose position is unknown

5.3.4.1 In the event of an emergency phase being declared in respect of a vessel whose position is unknown, the following shall apply:

.1 when a rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre is notified of the existence of an emergency phase and is unaware of other centres taking appropriate action, it shall assume responsibility for initiating suitable action and confer with neighbouring centres with the objective of designating one centre to assume responsibility forthwith;

.2 unless otherwise decided by agreement between the centres concerned, the centre to be designated shall be the centre responsible for the area in which the vessel was according to its last reported position; and

.3 after the declaration of the distress phase, the centre co-ordinating the search and rescue operations shall, if necessary, inform other appropriate centres of all the circumstances of the state of emergency and of all subsequent developments.

5.3.5 Passing information to vessels in respect of which an emergency phase has been declared

5.3.5.1 Whenever applicable, the rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre responsible for search and rescue operations shall be responsible for passing to the vessel for which an emergency phase has been declared, information on the search and rescue operation it has initiated.

5.4 Co-ordination when two or more parties are involved

5.4.1 Where the conduct of operations over the entire search and rescue region is that responsibility of more than one Party, each Party shall take appropriate action in accordance with the operating plans or instructions referred to in paragraph 4.2 when so requested by the rescue co-ordination centre of the region.

5.5 Termination and suspension of search and rescue operations

5.5.1 Uncertainty phase and alert phase

5.5.1.1 When during an uncertainty phase or an alert phase a rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre, as appropriate, is informed that the emergency no longer exists, it shall so inform any authority, unit or service which has been activated or notified.

5.5.2 Distress phase

5.5.2.1 When during a distress phase a rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre, as appropriate, is informed by the vessel in distress or other appropriate sources that the emergency no longer exists, it shall take the necessary action to terminate the search and rescue operations and to inform any authority, unit or service which has been activated or notified.

5.5.2.2 If during a distress phase it has been determined that the search should be discontinued the rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre, as appropriate, shall suspend the search and rescue operations and so inform any authority, unit or service which has been activated or notified. Information subsequently received shall be evaluated and search and rescue operations resumed when justified on the basis of such information.

5.5.2.3 If during a distress phase it has been determined that further search would be of no avail, the rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre, as

appropriate, shall terminate the search and rescue operations and so inform any authority, unit or service which has been activated or notified.

5.6 On-scene co-ordination of search and rescue activities

5.6.1 The activities of units engaged in search and rescue operations, whether they be rescue units or other assisting units, shall be co-ordinated to ensure the most effective results.

5.7 Designation of on-scene commander and his responsibilities

5.7.1 When rescue units are about to engage in search and rescue operations, one of them should be designated on-scene commander as early as practicable and preferably before arrival within the specified search area.

5.7.2 The appropriate rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre should designate an on-scene commander. If this is not practicable, the units involved should designate by mutual agreement an on-scene commander.

5.7.3 Until such time as an on-scene commander has been designated, the first rescue unit arriving at the scene of action should automatically assume the duties and responsibilities of an on-scene commander.

5.7.4 An on-scene commander shall be responsible for the following tasks when these have not been performed by the responsible rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre, as appropriate:

- .1 determining the probable position of the object of the search, the probable margin of error in this position, and the search area;
- .2 making arrangements for the separation for safety purposes of units engaged in the search;
- .3 designating appropriate search patterns for the units participating in the search and assigning search areas to units or groups of units;
- .4 designating appropriate units to effect rescue when the object of the search is located; and
- .5 co-ordinating on-scene search and rescue communications.

5.7.5 An on-scene commander shall also be responsible for the following:

- .1 making periodic reports to the rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre which is co-ordinating the search and rescue operations; and
- .2 reporting the number and the names of survivors to the rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre which is co-ordinating the search and

rescue operations, providing the centre with the names and destinations of units with survivors aboard, reporting which survivors are in each unit and requesting additional assistance from the centre when necessary, for example, medical evacuation of seriously injured survivors.

5.8 Designation of co-ordinator surface search and his responsibilities

5.8.1 If rescue units (including warships) are not available to assume the duties of an on-scene commander but a number of merchant vessels or other vessels are participating in the search and rescue operations, one of them should be designated by mutual agreement as co-ordinator surface search.

5.8.2 The co-ordinator surface search should be designated as early as practicable and preferably before arrival within the specified search area.

5.8.3 The co-ordinator surface search should be responsible for as many of the tasks listed in paragraphs 5.7.4 and 5.7.5 as the vessel is capable of performing.

5.9 Initial action

5.9.1 Any unit receiving information of a distress incident shall take whatever immediate action to assist as is within its capability or shall alert other units which might be able to assist and shall notify the rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre in whose area the incident has occurred.

5.10 Search areas

5.10.1 Search areas determined in accordance with paragraph 5.3.3.2, 5.7.4.1 or 5.8.3 may be altered as appropriate by the on-scene commander or the co-ordinator surface search, who should notify the rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre of his action and his reasons for doing so.

5.11 Search patterns

5.11.1 Search patterns designated in accordance with paragraph 5.3.3.6, 5.7.4.3 or 5.8.3 may be changed to other patterns if considered necessary by the on-scene commander or the co-ordinator surface search, who should notify the rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre of his action and his reasons for doing so.

5.12 Search successful

5.12.1 When the search has been successful the on-scene commander or the co-ordinator surface search should direct the most suitably equipped units to conduct the rescue or to provide other necessary assistance.

5.12.2 Where appropriate the units conducting the rescue should notify the on-scene commander or the co-ordinator surface search of the number and names of survivors aboard, whether all personnel have been accounted for and whether additional assistance is required, for example, medical evacuations, and the destination of the units.

5.12.3 The on-scene commander or the co-ordinator surface search should immediately notify the rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre when the search has been successful.

5.13 Search unsuccessful

5.13.1 The search should only be terminated when there is no longer any reasonable hope of rescuing survivors.

5.13.2 The rescue co-ordination centre or rescue sub-centre co-ordinating the search and rescue operations should normally be responsible for terminating the search.

5.13.3 In remote ocean areas not under the responsibility of a rescue co-ordination centre or where the responsible centre is not in a position to co-ordinate the search and rescue operations, the on-scene commander or the co-ordinator surface search may take responsibility for terminating the search.

CHAPTER 6

SHIP REPORTING SYSTEMS

6.1 General

6.1.1 Parties should establish a ship reporting system for application within any search and rescue region for which they are responsible, where this is considered necessary to facilitate search and rescue operations and is deemed practicable.

6.1.2 Parties contemplating the institution of a ship reporting system should take account of the relevant recommendations of the Organization.

6.1.3 The ship reporting system should provide up-to-date information on the movements of vessels in order, in the event of a distress incident:

- .1 to reduce the interval between the loss of contact with a vessel and the initiation of search and rescue operations in cases where no distress signal has been received;
- .2 to permit rapid determination of vessels which may be called upon to provide assistance;
- .3 to permit delineation of a search area of limited size in case the position of a vessel in distress is unknown or uncertain; and
- .4 to facilitate the provision of urgent medical assistance or advice to vessels not carrying a doctor.

6.2 Operational requirements

6.2.1 To achieve the objectives set out in paragraph 6.1.3, the ship reporting system should satisfy the following operational requirements:

- .1 provision of information, including sailing plans and position reports, which would make it possible to predict the future positions of participating vessels;
- .2 maintenance of a shipping plot;
- .3 receipt of reports at appropriate intervals from participating vessels;
- .4 simplicity in system design and operation; and
- .5 use of an internationally agreed standard ship reporting format and internationally agreed standard procedures.

6.3 Types of reports

6.3.1 A ship reporting system should incorporate the following reports:

- .1 Sailing plan - giving name, call sign or ship station identity, date and time (in GMT) of departure, details of the vessel's point of departure, next port of call, intended route, speed and expected date and time (in GMT) of arrival. Significant changes should be reported as soon as possible.
- .2 Position report - giving name, call sign or ship station identity, date and time (in GMT), position, course and speed.
- .3 Final report - giving name, call sign or ship station identity, date and time (in GMT) of arrival at destination or of leaving the area covered by the system.

6.4 Use of systems

6.4.1 Parties should encourage all vessels to report their positions when travelling in areas where arrangements have been made to collect information on positions for search and rescue purposes.

6.4.2 Parties recording information on the position of vessels should disseminate, so far as practicable, such information to other States when so requested for search and rescue purposes.

[\[1\]](#) Instrument of accession deposited for Australia 7 November 1983.

[\[2\]](#) The Convention entered into force for Australia and generally 22 June 1985.