



AFI Interregional Search and Rescue Workshop LUANDA, 17 -21 June 2024

**History and evolution of the SAR  
organisation in Democratic Republic  
of the Congo  
Luanda, june 2024**



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**History and evolution of the SAR organisation in Democratic  
Republic of the Congo**

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## ■ Introduction

- This presentation is made with the aim of sharing the experience of the DRC in search and rescue operations of civil aircraft in distress inside its territory and in its internal waters.
- In view of its vast national territory of 2,345,410 km<sup>2</sup>, the organization of search and rescue in the DRC has been a vital concern for the organizing authority of transport in DRC. With the complexity of its geographical configuration comprising the central basin, the mountains that delimit it to the east and southwest, the large dense equatorial forest that occupies almost half of the national area, a very long river and numerous lakes, the Country needs a very strong SAR organization to maintain an acceptable level of safety in a constant growth of the domestic air traffic.



## 1. History and Legal basis

After the country's independence (in 1960), the organization of the Search and Rescue Service in DRC stemmed from the application of Article 25 of the Convention on International Civil Aviation, known as the Chicago Convention, and the Decree 65/198 of 30 July 1965, which provided that search and rescue are under the responsibility of the Ministry of Defense on national territory and within the limits of territorial waters (200 NM from the sea coast).



- In the second half of the sixties and the first half of the seventies, the Ministry of Defense had a central board for SAR studies and coordination, composed of mixed personnel from the Air Force, the Naval Force, Civil Aeronautics, Public Security, Civil Protection and Health. The organizational chart of this operational structure revealed the preponderant role of the Air Force, however a relevant provision of the decree provided that no major provision modifying the system could be taken without prior consultation between the authorities concerned.



In the light of the Decree 65/198 of 30 July 1965, the SAR organization of that period was designed as an interdepartmental cooperative system with a preponderance of the military, where each organization contributed to SAR operations in its respective area of competence.

So, the role of managing distress messages and triggering the various emergency phases fell to the ATS units which belonged to the Civil Aeronautics; while the role of providing the logistics necessary for the research fell to the Air Force; for maritime, river and lake research at the Coast, River and Lake Guard (GCFL), which became the Naval Force which possessed maritime means.



- We noted the important role of other actors such as:
  1. ONATRA (public boats and railway service) and some private operators for search in the Congo river,
  2. Air Congo (the national airline), and other private operators for search in the air,
  3. The national police and the red cross for search and rescue on ground.





## ■ 2. Evolution

- The situation remained so until the end of the 70s, when despite the few successes in the SAR operations organized at that time, the service nevertheless had shortcomings in relation to the evolution of the standards of Annex 12, including the absence of a national SAR plan, and recommended operational structures such as the RCC and RSC.
- This state of affairs occurred at a time when the RVA had just been created in February 1972 with a SAR service operating within the Directorate of Air Navigation, which later became "Aeronautical Operations" which began to gradually fill the void that was created in the coordination of SAR operations.



At the end of the 90s, the RVA (ANSP) started organizing SAR by creating 3 Rescue Sub-Centers but due to lack of facilities and staff, the effective implementation didn't go further.

It was also during this period that the SAR agreement with Congo/Brazzaville was signed, followed a few years later by the submission of the draft SAR agreements of Zambia and Uganda.



- **3. Current SAR Organization**

- A second decree on SAR has been signed on October 2<sup>nd</sup> 2012 which created a SAR coordination centre composed of many departments from different Ministries among others Transports, Defense, Public health, Humanitarian affairs and so forth.
- From that moment, SAR organization is split to 3 major components during an occurrence :
  - 1, SPOC : Led and located by/at the Headquarter of Air Force, our SAR Single Point of Contact is still a group of many entities interacting to manage ELT alerts originated from COSPAS-SARSAT through our MCC located in South Africa (ASMCC),



- 2, SAR National Committee : it plays the role of coordination in the national level and it's conducted by the Minister of Transport to assess the effectiveness of the SAR Plan. This Committee is also the one which help to coordinate with other States in case of an accident near national boundary, Such similar cases happened at least twice with Congo/Brazzaville flights to Ndolo or N'djili airports where lost and then found to Brazzaville.
- 3, Intervention units : almost composed of military and police elements who may intervene in case of need.



#### 4, Challenges

- Lack of SAR agreement with neighbouring States except with Congo Brazzaville which is also outdated in view of the ICAO SAR SARPs evolution.
- Weak rate of sensitization of deciders regarding SAR organisation
  - Lack of fundings to support best implementation of ICAO SAR SARPs contained in annex 12
  - Low frequency in organizing SAR exercises.
- Etc,



# Conclusion

SAR services in DRC are rendered to civil aircrafts in distress according to the provisions of Article 25 of the CC and its annex 12.

However, the national SAR Plan needs to be updated. Projects of amendments to the SAR decree is going to be signed soon to allocate more fundings to the SAR organisation.

For SAR agreements with adjacent States, first of all, political environment in our region seems to be a major challenge for the implementation of some ICAO SAR standards.

On the other side, the plenipotentiary power to sign SAR agreement would need to be given to DGCAA to facilitate African States to sign SAR Agreement.



***Merci beaucoup***