

SAR TF INTERIM REPORT

In the 2009 Tromsø Declaration, Arctic Council Ministers approved “the establishment of a task force to develop and complete negotiation by the next Ministerial meeting in 2011 of an international instrument on cooperation on search and rescue operations in the Arctic.” Ambassadors David Balton of the United States and myself co-chair the Task Force, and all eight Arctic States are actively engaged in its efforts. The Arctic SAR Task Force met in Washington in December 2009 and in Moscow in February 2010 and will next meet in Oslo on 7-9 June. The Task Force continues to make good progress toward an aeronautical and maritime SAR agreement that will be ready for signature at the 2011 Ministerial.

So, what’s important is that we have reached an agreement to elaborate a legally binding document. This means that the nature of our exercise in the Task Force has turned into full-fledged intergovernmental negotiations, led by national delegations where all interested national ministries and agencies are represented. And we follow the principle of consensus and the principle that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. This is why at this stage it would be premature to disclose publicly the particular details of the negotiating process. There is still a lot to be done. But we are all united by the same vision that we should try hard to prepare the text for signature by our ministers at the next ministerial, which will be a land-mark event in the history of the Arctic Council.

We are working in a very friendly and very professional atmosphere.

As a co-chair of the Task Force, I would like to thank Norway for its very generous proposal to hold the 3rd round of the SAR Task Force negotiations in Oslo.

While successful completion of the agreement will be good news, it should not be seen as the ultimate goal. SAR capabilities in the Arctic region are limited and the remoteness and harsh conditions of the Arctic present special challenges to conducting operations. The ultimate goal needs to be improving SAR capabilities to respond to increased human activity in this challenging region. Arctic States need to work both independently and together to enhance SAR capacity and cooperation. This Task Force has been an important step in fostering such collaboration.

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