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France takes up chair of Cospas-Sarsat Council

Meeting last week in Montreal, Canada, the Cospas-Sarsat Council appointed France as its chair, effective 11 December for a year, in the person of Bruno Chazal, France's representative on the Council and Cospas-Sarsat Programme Manager at CNES.

Following last week's meeting of the Cospas-Sarsat Council in Montreal, France was appointed as chair until its last meeting next year that will be held in Paris, attended by the organization's 42 nations and member bodies. The Council will thus be chaired by Bruno Chazal, France's representative to the Council and Cospas-Sarsat Programme Manager at CNES.

Cospas-Sarsat is a satellite-based international search-and-rescue (SAR) programme that responds to distress calls by detecting and locating distress beacons activated by aircraft, ships (today all aircraft and ships are equipped with such beacons) and people on land. Cospas-Sarsat provides the international community, in timely and non-discriminatory fashion, with precise and reliable location data to assist with SAR operations, using space sensors and ground systems to detect and locate signals from distress beacons. The system aims to support organizations in charge of SAR operations all over the world, at sea, on land and in the air.

The Cospas-Sarsat system was used operationally by SAR agencies for the first time on 10 September 1982 to save three people involved in an aircraft accident in Canada. Since then, it has been used more than 11,000 times and helped to save 40,000 lives around the world. In 2014 alone, Cospas-Sarsat enabled 685 SAR operations to save 2,354 people.

The initial International Cospas-Sarsat Programme Agreement (ICSPA) was signed by Canada, France, Russia and the United States in Paris on 1 July 1988. The organization today has 42 member nations and bodies. 2016 is set to be a milestone year for the programme with the gradual transition to a space-based infrastructure in medium-Earth orbit, with SAR payloads on the navigation satellites of the Galileo, GPS and Glonass constellations.

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