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Opening of Cospas-Sarsat French Mission Control Centre and SAR-Galileo Service Centre

Tuesday 28 June at the Toulouse Space Centre (CST), CNES President Jean-Yves Le Gall officially opened the Cospas-Sarsat French Mission Control Centre (FMCC) and the SAR-Galileo Service Centre alongside Pierre Delsaux, Deputy Director General with responsibility for space at the European Commission, Bruno Chazal, Chair of the Cospas-Sarsat Council, and representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development, the French civil aviation authority (DGAC) and the Directorate of Maritime Affairs (DAM).

Founded during the Cold War by France, Canada, the United States and the Soviet Union, Cospas-Sarsat is a satellite-based system that provides the international community with accurate and reliable location data to assist search-and-rescue (SAR) operations, thanks to spaceborne instruments and a network of ground stations that detect and pinpoint signals from emergency locator beacons. Since its inception, Cospas-Sarsat has helped to save 40,000 lives around the world on 11,000 distress call-outs.

2016 is a watershed for Cospas-Sarsat as it lays the groundwork for a second generation of beacons and above all makes the transition from the LEOSAR low-Earth orbit and GEOSAR geostationary orbit systems currently in operation to a MEOSAR system using satellites in medium-Earth orbit: Galileo for Europe, GPS for the United States and Glonass for Russia. MEOSAR will provide both global coverage and the ability to precisely locate distress beacons in near-real time. It will also rely heavily on the European Commission's SAR-Galileo service, for which CNES is the operator as well as providing expertise for performance assessment under a 10-year framework agreement signed this year.

At the official opening, CNES President Jean-Yves Le Gall commented: "Cospas-Sarsat has never seen as many changes in its history as it is seeing now. CNES, as the Cospas-Sarsat cooperating body for France delegated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development, is proud to be working with its national partners, with the European Commission and with search-and-rescue bodies around the world. All of these efforts, all of these resources and all of these successes are enabling us to pursue our actions for the benefit of Europe's and the world's citizens, and helping to accomplish the noble mission of saving lives."

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