

Beidou joins global rescue data network

China's domestically developed navigation satellite system Beidou has been included in a global network that collects and distributes data for search and rescue missions, the Ministry of Transport said on Thursday.

Beidou will be part of the International Cospas-Sarsat Programme, a nonprofit, intergovernmental and humanitarian cooperative with 44 members, including the United States, Canada, Russia and China.

The inclusion comes after a ministry delegation submitted the Chinese system's technology and launch plan for search and rescue to the program during the 31st Cospas-Sarsat Council meeting in late October in Montreal, Canada.

"The move will enhance Beidou's global capability to search for and rescue people in distress, showing China has carried out its responsibilities in global humanitarianism in accordance with international conventions," Wu Chungeng, a ministry spokesman, said at a news conference on Thursday.

"It also supports Beidou's global development, promoting the system's international influence and power in the field of satellite navigation," he said.

Beidou is the world's fourth navigation satellite system, following US-based GPS, Russia's GLONASS and the European Union's Galileo.

"China has mastered the core technology of space payload and ground systems for search and rescue satellite systems. It is time to research and develop the self-controlled search and rescue system with Beidou," Wu said.

The International Cospas-Sarsat Programme is a satellite-based search and rescue distress alert detection and information distribution system best known for detecting and locating emergency beacons activated by aircraft, ships and hikers in distress.

It aims to "provide accurate, timely and reliable distress alerts and location data to help search and rescue authorities assist people in distress". It uses the GPS, GLONASS and Galileo systems for its missions.

China has been striving to promote Beidou to more international organizations to expand the space network's use overseas, according to Ran Chengqi, director of the China Satellite Navigation Office.

He said China has begun to collaborate with GPS, GLONASS and Galileo on frequency coordination and ground applications.

"Beidou-based products are being used in more than 30 nations. Next, we will give the system global coverage and improve its stability and reliability. In

addition, more efforts will be made to develop ground applications," he said.

Twenty-nine satellites have been launched for the Beidou network, the first in 2000 and the most recent in November. The system began providing positioning, navigation, timing and messaging services to civilian users in China and parts of the Asia-Pacific region in December 2012.

Beidou has acquired a great number of users in China. Most of the shared bicycles in Chinese cities now employ Beidou-based positioning services; more than 4 million taxis, long-distance buses and cargo trucks nationwide have been equipped with Beidou devices; and about 40 percent of smartphones in the Chinese market are able to access the services.