



UNITED NATIONS

NATIONS UNIES

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

UNITED NATIONS TEAM DEPLOYS TO SOLOMON ISLANDS

(New York: 3 April 2007): A six-member United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team has been deployed to the Pacific country of the Solomon Islands, which was struck by a tsunami generated by a large underwater earthquake on 2 April.

That first earthquake has been followed by a series of at least 27 smaller aftershocks, although no further damage has been reported. The Australian Seismological Centre warns of a high possibility of further large earthquakes in the days to come.

According to latest reports, at least 28 people have been killed, 19 injured, and over 5,400 displaced. Many more people remain missing and/or unaccounted for. An initial assessment mission organized by the National Disaster Council (NDC) on Choiseul Island reports that an estimated 1,000 houses have been destroyed and an aerial assessment has confirmed widespread destruction. More detailed information has been difficult to obtain due to communication outages and difficulties of access. A second NDC assessment will take place in the next few days.

With the Solomon Islands Government yesterday declaring a state of emergency, the NDC has identified priority needs as being tents, tarpaulins, food, utensils, water, containers, medical supplies, clothing and tools. Three search and rescue missions, organized by the Government and the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), are currently underway. The RAMSI will also provide military transport planes for the delivery of relief assistance and medical supplies.

The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) Central Control Group is currently coordinating humanitarian assistance with the support of the local Red Cross and has established an office in Munda. The NDMO is sending four boats with food, water, and medical supplies to the affected areas, including Choiseul and Shortland Islands.

Meanwhile, a health assessment is being conducted by the Undersecretary for Health Services, and the Prime Minister has requested the establishment of a field hospital in Gizo, as the main hospitals in Gizo and Munda are reportedly damaged and unusable. Public health experts are warning of the potential danger of malaria outbreaks among the displaced population. The Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) will work with the Government to distribute mosquito nets, spray insecticide and disseminate health information to affected communities in Western Province. Additionally, the World Health Organisation (WHO) is dispatching a staff member from its Fiji office and will provide technical support and mobilize resources for malaria control.

Also part of the international response, a team from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is being deployed to the Solomon Islands, while the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Télécoms sans Frontières (TSF) has deployed a small disaster response team to provide telecommunications support for the relief operations and the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO) is to deploy a regional rapid response assessment officer as well.

The Government of New Zealand has announced a contribution of some \$360,000 (NZ\$ 500,000), as well as in-kind assistance for the relief effort. The New Zealand Red Cross has pledged approximately \$7,000 (NZ\$ 10,000) to the Solomon Islands Red Cross and will also provided in kind assistance. Meanwhile, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) will provide approximately \$53,000 to fund an assessment team and initial relief assistance for 2,000 people.

For further information, please call: Stephanie Bunker, OCHA-New York, +1 917 367 5126, mobile +1 917 892 1679; Kristen Knutson, OCHA-New York, +1 917 367 9262; Elisabeth Byrs, OCHA-Geneva, +41 22 917 2653, mobile, +41 79 473 4570. OCHA press releases are available at <http://ochaonline.un.org> or www.reliefweb.int.