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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

**UN AGENCIES SAY WATER, SANITATION AND HEALTH AID
NEEDED IN SOLOMON ISLANDS**

(New York: 5 April 2007): International assistance is arriving in the Solomon Islands, the Pacific nation of half a million struck by a tsunami triggered by a large underwater earthquake on 2 April, but United Nations agencies warn of potential health concerns related to shortages of clean drinking water, adequate sanitation facilities, and malaria prevention.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), malaria control has improved in the Solomon Islands in recent years, due to active case detection and drug management, use of insecticide-treated bednets, and specific vector control measures. However, those displaced will be at increased risk of malaria transmission, while the number of mosquito breeding sites will also have increased. Due to the time it takes to contract and incubate, the number of malaria cases is expected to rise over the next two months. The WHO Western Pacific Regional Office (WPRO) Malaria and Vector Borne Diseases unit is working with the WHO country Office on measures to prevent malaria outbreaks.

Additionally, there are reports of diarrhoea outbreaks in some camps where those displaced by the tsunami have sought shelter. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is working to assess the damage to water and sanitation infrastructures and notes that water purification tablets, jerry cans and water tanks are needed. The UNICEF has already used pre-positioned medical supplies and financial reserves to provide assistance to those affected by the earthquake and tsunami, including measles vaccines and vitamin A supplements for children aged six months to four years. The children's agency will also provide educational materials for temporary schools.

Volunteers from the Solomon Islands Red Cross (SIRC) are carrying out assessments in remote areas, by canoe where necessary. The SIRC is also distributing relief items, including sheets and tarpaulins, but notes that water containers and purification systems, as well as medical supplies and cooking sets are still needed.

According to the National Disaster Council, the death toll from the earthquake and tsunami is 34, with several dozen people still missing. An estimated 5,500 have been displaced, while as many as 50,000 -- half of the population of Western and Choiseul provinces -- could be affected.

Financial and/or in-kind assistance has been provided by the Governments of Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Japan, France, and the United States.

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