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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

COMMUNICABLE DISEASES UNDER CONTROL IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

(New York, 12 April 2007): In the Solomon Islands, needs assessment and response are still being hampered by lack of access to and communication with the affected areas. Some areas have not yet been reached by the relief teams, although radio contact has been re-established for the most part.

However, communicable diseases are under control. Only a few cases of diarrhoea have been reported, and the Ministry of Health has surveillance systems in place for a possible outbreak of malaria.

The Government of the Solomon Islands (GoSI) estimates the number of casualties at 35, while the number of affected is estimated at 9,000 people, with at least 1,500 people still requiring urgent assistance.

Shelter and return of the displaced are the main challenges. The tsunami-affected communities are camping on the hillsides, afraid to return to their coastal homes due to frequent tremors. Many of the displaced left homes that were not damaged, which has increased the numbers in the camps. In Gizo, tanks and water pipes have suffered damage and require urgent repair. Water and purification tablets are available but water distribution is problematic due to considerable distances between water sources and the camps as well as destruction of water sources due to the earthquake and landslides. In some other areas, the tsunami polluted local rivers.

A measles vaccination campaign is planned for 16 April by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organisation (WHO), and the Ministry of Health. Technical assessment and repair at the Gizo hospital are ongoing, and the facility should be operational within a week.

UNICEF sent tens of thousands of packets of oral rehydration salts to Gizo, while Save the Children (SCF) distributed basic medicines and water purification tablets to four villages and camps. Save the Children Australia has also set up a mobile distribution point for three camps with over 1,500 people in Gizo. A mobile water supply system has been installed in Munda to service five camps with over 2,700 people. A joint team from SCF Australia, Muslim Aid Australia, and Global Medic has restored the water supply to Munda and Gizo hospitals.

In addition, Japan donated US\$300,000 to UNICEF and US\$200,000 to IFRC to continue with their relief efforts. The British High Commission provided \$250,000 for purchase of relief supplies. Taiwan is transporting rice, vegetables and other food items from Honiara to Gizo. Two planes will also deliver relief supplies donated by Papua New Guinea. Australia increased its assistance in response to the Solomon Islands earthquake to approximately \$3 million. Six Australian medical teams have also been deployed to the disaster-affected areas.

An earthquake measuring 8.1 struck 345 kilometres northwest of the Solomon Islands' capital Honiara at 0740 local time on 02 April. The earthquake created a tsunami, which caused casualties and significant damage in the country.

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