

World Tsunami Awareness Day: strengthening the global commitment to disasters risk reduction.



Official photo, World Tsunami Awareness Day. Photo Credit: Association of Caribbean States (ACS)

By: UNISDR – The Americas

PORT-OF-SPAIN, Trinidad and Tobago, October 25th, 2016- The first commemoration of the World Tsunami Awareness Day (WTAD) in the Caribbean took place on October 20th in Trinidad and Tobago, to share experiences and tools for promoting tsunami risk reduction, and identifying activities for future WTAD in the Caribbean. This meeting was organized prior to the Special Committee for Disaster Risk Reduction of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) on October 21st,

Although tsunamis do not occur very frequently, they can cause considerable damages. The 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami affected 14 different countries and caused more than 227.000 casualties in the region, while the 2011 Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami, in Japan, killed more than 13.000 people. **Christa G. von Hillebrandt-Andrade**, Chair of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Coordination Group on Tsunamis and Other Coastal Hazards Warning System for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions, announced that the Caribbean has suffered 75 tsunamis, over the last 500 years, nearly 10% of the worldwide total over the same period.

Within this context, disaster risk management has become an indispensable goal for many countries and organizations in the Caribbean and worldwide, that have joined efforts to build and reinforce initiatives with the aim of strengthening tsunami resilience. This WTAD, supported by the Government of Japan, aims to raise public awareness on the deadly threats posed by tsunamis as well as sharing innovative approaches for reducing risk. The WTAD also represents an opportunity to showcase good practices related to Tsunami preparedness and to support the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, as well as the Comprehensive

Disaster Management Strategy 2014-2024 which contributes to a greater understanding of disaster risk while aiming to reduce mortality.

Stephen Ramroop, Director of the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management (ODPM) referred to the fact that “Tsunamis have a significant potential for disasters and without early warning systems the consequences could be devastating. Based on the previous earthquake patterns, the Caribbean region is at greatest risk of tsunamis”. Likewise, **Mitsuhiko Okada**, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, expressed Japan’s concern regarding the vulnerability of small island developing states and indicated their willingness to assist in any way they can to improve the Sendai Framework for Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

Furthermore, **Ronald Jackson**, Executive Director from the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), asserted that the Caribbean countries should prepare themselves for tsunamis even if tsunamis have not threatened the region as much as other natural hazards. Jackson also highlighted the recent increased concern over the activity of the underwater volcano of the coast of Grenada, Kick’em Jenny. “The risk is low but these factors highlight that the region needs to better prepared to mitigate the impact of disasters”, he said.

During the event, UNESCO/IOC recognized Saint Kitts and Nevis as tsunami ready States. In this regards, **Ms. von Hillebrandt-Andrade**, as well as **Mr. Jackson** encouraged the rest of the region to do everything necessary to be certified as well; while **Dr. June Soomer**, Secretary General of the Association of the Caribbean States (ACS), asserted that the region could further its initiative to become tsunami ready.

This year’s WTAD is focusing on effective education and encouraging the implementation of evacuation drills. The commemoration in the Caribbean region was attended by more than 40 participants from nine ACS member states, the Government of Japan as well as intergovernmental, regional and United Nations organizations and was organized by UNISDR in conjunction with UNESCO/IOC, the ACS, CDEMA as well as CEPREDENAC.

Related links:

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[Caribbean Tsunami Smart Initiative](#)

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