



April 2007

Solomon Islands: Western and Choiseul Provinces Earthquake and Tsunami

I. SITUATION

1. On 2 April 2007, a massive undersea earthquake measuring 8.1 on the Richter scale triggered a tsunami that struck the islands of Gizo, Simbo, Ranongga, Shortlands, New Georgia, Mono, Vella Lavella and Kolomobangara in the Western Province and Choiseul Province of Solomon Islands. (The tsunami also reached Papua New Guinea, however with very limited damage and casualty.) There have been numerous aftershocks, the worst of which measuring 6.2 on the Richter scale. An estimated 20,000 people of a total population of 90,000 in both provinces have been affected. Over 5,000 people are estimated to be displaced, 52 people have been confirmed dead, mostly children. Outbreaks of diseases in the affected areas have been largely brought under control.

2. All islands in the affected provinces suffered widespread damage to housing, infrastructure, schools, and medical facilities. Several villages were completely destroyed. The force of the quake was such that the physical environment of the islands and reefs have changed, leaving a small number of islands and reefs tilted and causing concern about the impact on coastal vulnerability, ground water levels, agriculture and livelihoods.

II. DISASTER RESPONSE

3. The initial relief effort was led by the National Disaster Council (NDC), the Solomon Islands Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross. The United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team (UNDAC), mobilized on 5 April 2007 assisted NDC in coordinating the response to the emergency. A joint UNDAC/NDC team arrived with a team in Gizo on 7 April to support the Provincial Disaster Council and coordinate the relief effort.

4. Food and water was distributed in the first days of the crisis. Medical evacuations were facilitated by helicopters provided by the Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI). A number of international and local NGOs, supported by international donations, have provided relief on the ground. UNICEF has had a leading role in non-food item distribution, water supply and sanitation, shelter, and health. Logistics support and medical services were also rendered by the Australian, French, New Zealand and US defense forces. Early in the emergency phase, cluster working groups on shelter, health, water and sanitation, non-food item distribution, and child protection were facilitated by UNDAC.

5. An initial damage assessment is being undertaken by the Solomon Islands Government NDC. A Technical Advisory Team (TAT) has been established under the NDC to coordinate recovery efforts, develop a Recovery Action Plan (RAP), and coordinate and monitor its implementation. TAT is led by the Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination and its members represent key ministries. Subcommittees have been formed around Health (including water supply and sanitation), Infrastructure & Energy, Education, Agriculture, Housing and Communication.

6. The relief phase is now transitioning towards recovery and rehabilitation. A United Nations Development Program (UNDP) team has been fielded to assist the Government during the early recovery phase for the next 4 weeks. In this phase, a Recovery Action Plan will be formulated; coordination mechanisms among Government, development partners and NGOs developed; and monitoring and reporting systems for early recovery activities established. Subsequently, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) will help facilitate the longer term reconstruction and rehabilitation phase.

III. ADB'S ROLE

7. In immediate disaster response, ADB dispatched staff to Solomon Islands, in support of infrastructure assessments, communications, programming, and donor coordination. Staff visited the affected areas, supported the Ministry of Infrastructure Development in carrying out initial infrastructure damage and needs assessment, and provided strategic advice to the Ministry of Development Planning and Aid Coordination in defining and establishing the process toward recovery and rehabilitation. The team engaged with the Government to determine the role ADB could play in the recovery and rehabilitation phases.

8. Government has requested ADB, on the basis of a Cabinet decision, to help coordinate the Earthquake and Tsunami reconstruction and rehabilitation process. Staff specialized in disaster risk management has been fielded to assist Government in the management of the transition phase toward reconstruction and rehabilitation, and to specify and initiate ADB's support in coordinating the reconstruction and rehabilitation phase.

9. In addition, ADB has agreed to assist the Government in the coordination of reconstruction and rehabilitation of infrastructure damage. This will be managed through the Ministry of Infrastructure Development (MID) and closely aligned with ongoing ADB supported infrastructure projects in Solomon Islands.

10. ADB is also preparing an emergency assistance project for Board consideration to support disaster recovery and rehabilitation. Specifically, the project will assist the Government in rehabilitating damaged roads and bridges, wharves and jetties, and water supplies. The project would be financed through ADF grant allocation for Solomon Islands, but will require additional grant-based co-financing.