

12-23 July 2010

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Government of Germany for providing the resources for this Pacific regional training course co-hosted by the Government of Fiji and GFZ1 Potsdam¹. SOPAC is happy to have been invited to assist with the logistical arrangements including the travel for the regional participants. I would also like to acknowledge other partners including Geoscience Australia, the Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences of New Zealand, and the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, in Noumea.

SOPAC's work in the region in cooperation with Germany goes back many years indeed almost to the origin of CCOP/SOPAC in 1972. Marine geophysical cruise surveys utilizing the RV Sonne are well documented throughout SOPAC history. Regrettably, this direct assistance from Germany has waned. I am hopeful that this training course will re-invigorate those historic ties.

The most recent large earthquake and tsunami of 30 September 2009, which killed nearly 200 in Samoa, American Samoa and Tonga, and the large Chile Earthquake on 27 February 2010, which killed several hundreds and triggered a Pacific basin-wide tsunami each clearly remind us of the extreme exposure to such events in the small islands states located in and around the Pacific Rim of Fire.

Despite the success of the well-established Pacific-wide Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre operating from Hawaii, in September 2004, the STAR Tsunami Working Group called on SOPAC to work towards the establishment of a sub-regional SW-Pacific tsunami warning centre to address the specific exposure of island countries to local and regional tsunami sources. A development, which was over-shadowed by the Indian Ocean Tsunami, which saw huge investments in its aftermath in tsunami warning and the establishment of the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System as well as national tsunami warning systems, such as the Joint Australian Tsunami Warning System.

The question remains for Pacific island countries, "Are we any better prepared now?"

An assessment of national capacities of SOPAC Member Countries in tsunami warning and mitigation conducted by the Australian Bureau of Meteorology in partnership with SOPAC in all 14 independent Pacific Islands States between 2007 and 2009 concluded that although good progress is being made in some countries there are in general still large gaps in tsunami specific response plans and legislation, evacuation plans and procedures, national seismic

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 21 July 2010 11:56 - Last Updated Wednesday, 21 July 2010 12:06

networks and particular the connectivity with neighboring countries, effective communication systems, and seismic and tsunami hazard assessment to identify vulnerable coastlines.

A study conducted by Geoscience Australia in cooperation with SOPAC shows that the tsunami risk to island countries is significant and points out that missing baseline datasets, such as high resolution near-shore bathymetry and topography hampers any detailed tsunami hazard assessment based on inundation modeling.

SOPAC supports its member countries in acquiring these datasets through multi-beam swath mapping and on-shore real time kinematic surveys. A series of these surveys had been conducted as part of the EU funded project on Reducing the Vulnerability of Pacific ACP states 2003-2008. In cooperation with Geoscience Australia SOPAC intends to utilise such data to generate a tsunami hazard and inundation map for Tongatapu by the end of this year.

In addition, SOPAC again assisted by the EU is assisting the Port Moresby Geophysical Observatory to re-establish its national seismic network and is fostering regional cooperation on seismic monitoring.

SOPAC will continue providing assistance to its member countries in the aftermath of major disasters both to address the humanitarian needs in strengthening the NDMOs during this crucial time as well as in conducting or facilitating and coordinating technical post disaster assessments.

Further, SOAPC is addressing the lack of knowledge on paleo-earthquake and tsunami history of active plate margins within the Pacific Islands Region by conducting a regional expert meeting in Tonga 2007 and supporting pilot research projects in Vanuatu and Fiji.

In closing, may I once again welcome the initiative by GFZ Potsdam in conducting this seismic and tsunami hazard training course and hope it will further encourage cooperation with SOPAC.

1 GeoForschungsZentrum (GFZ) Potsdam is the German research centre for geosciences that has worldwide interest in investigating geological, physical, chemical and biological processes of earth systems which occur at its surface and in its interior.