

PRESS RELEASE

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MEETING IN MAURITIUS FOR A TSUNAMI EARLY WARNING SYSTEM IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

Representatives from Indian Ocean countries affected by the 26 December 2004 tsunami and other countries and experts on early warning systems will gather in Mauritius for the Second International Coordination Meeting for the Development of a Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System for the Indian Ocean on 14-16 April 2005. Co-organised by the UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and UN/ISDR, the meeting will further elaborate plans for a tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean.

“We need to act quickly and have an early warning system operational as soon as possible in the Indian Ocean,” says Salvano Briceño, Director of the ISDR secretariat. “The earthquake that struck Indonesia on 28 March is a timely reminder of what we might expect in the future. Some geologists are suggesting that these earthquakes along the Sumatra fault line could be part of a domino effect triggering further large earthquakes and tsunamis. More than ever we need to give attention to disaster preparedness including local risk assessments in these areas” adds Salvano Briceño.

Following their previous meeting held in Paris in March, Indian Ocean countries and international partners have created a partial tsunami early warning system, by beefing-up ocean observing systems and national tsunami warning capacities, and by making specific arrangements for the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre in Hawaii and the Japan Meteorological Agency in Tokyo to transmit warning information to national contact points in the region

“The partial system worked well in the 28 March event but a lot more needs to be done to establish a fully fledged system that meets the needs of the participating countries, a point that will be addressed at the meeting in Mauritius,” says Salvano Briceño. “Now is the time to turn the promises to support a tsunami warning system into cash and to build a good system that will be running smoothly by the end of 2006 – if not before.”

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The meeting in Mauritius will discuss how national tsunami warning centres can work in a regional operational framework, clarifying the responsibilities of countries and national, sub-regional and regional centers to ensure an effective tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean.

“Effective early warning systems need strong technical foundations, but they also need sustained efforts on public awareness, education and national disaster risk policies and planning. This will be the next challenge,” adds Salvano Briceño. “Education is a key factor to success. The prompt response to warnings disseminated throughout the region, following the recent quake, showed that when people know what to do, they have a better chance to save their lives.”

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