



## UN AND EU EXPERTS RECOMMEND CLOSE WATCH ON HAZARDOUS DAM IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

(Brussels/Geneva/Honiara/Nairobi, 13 May 2014): A United Nations assessment team has recommended close monitoring and immediate action for a controlled lowering of water levels of a gold mine tailings dam in the Solomon Islands following recent flash floods. The dam itself was found to be currently stable despite the extremely high water levels, but in acute need of monitoring and management. Only by continuous monitoring and controlled lowering of water levels can the threat that an overspill or breach posed to downstream communities and the environment be minimised.

In early April, flash floods and heavy rains elevated water levels in the Gold Ridge Mine tailings dam 30km southeast of the capital Honiara, potentially affecting around 8,000 people in downstream communities. A United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team was deployed on 23 April in response to a request by the Solomon Islands Government to assess the risk of contaminated tailings water breaching the dam as well as to formulate recommendations to safely prevent such an event.

The independent team of technical experts, in close cooperation with national ministries and community representatives, conducted several site visits and chemical analyses to assess the tailing dam's stability and the potential risks posed by the tailings water.

“We provided recommendations to local authorities to immediately prepare for the dewatering of the tailings dam,” said Ms. Emilia Wahlstrom, UNDAC team leader. “At the same time, we need to continuously monitor water levels, dam stability and water quality in order to avoid risks to nearby communities and the environment.”

Due to the time needed for such a controlled process, preparations will need to start immediately in order for it to be completed well ahead of the next rainy season starting in November.

Assessment outcomes and recommendations on immediate and longer term actions have been shared with the Government. These include on-site management, monitoring programmes and contingency planning.

The UNDAC team was deployed by the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit with the support of the European Union's Civil Protection Mechanism. The team departed on 8 May.

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### Further information

Joint United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)/OCHA Environment Unit (JEU):  
<http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/coordination-tools/environmental-emergencies>

United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) mechanism:  
<http://www.unocha.org/what-we-do/coordination-tools/undac/overview>

European Union Civil Protection Mechanism:  
[http://ec.europa.eu/echo/policies/disaster\\_response/mechanism\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/policies/disaster_response/mechanism_en.htm)

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