I. HIGHLIGHTS/KEY PRIORITIES

- Government of Japan mobilizes thousands of troops, planes and ships for a massive emergency response operation
- State of Emergency declared due to the threat posed by reactors in two nuclear power plants, thousands of people evacuated in response
- Emergency specialist teams from a number of countries deployed to help rescue survivors
- No reported impact from tsunamis in the Pacific Islands and all tsunami warnings have been withdrawn

II. Situation Overview

A major emergency response operation is underway in northeast Japan following Friday's devastating tsunami triggered by the biggest earthquake on record in Japan. The 8.9 magnitude earthquake that hit at 1446 local time (0546 GMT), 120 km off the northeastern coast, at a depth of 20 km was followed by 10-metre high tsunami, causing widespread destruction. Large coastal areas have been submerged and entire villages washed away. The vast majority of causalities are likely to be as a result of the tsunami rather than the earthquake.

Immediately following the disaster the Government established an Emergency Response Team, headed by Prime Minister Naoto Kan. The Government has mobilized thousands of troops for the rescue effort. More than 300 planes and 40 ships are conducting airlifts and boat rescues. Continued aftershocks and tsunami are hampering rescue efforts. Up to three metre high waves continue to hit the coastline. There have been at least 79 aftershocks in the region since the first powerful earthquake and 16 of them have been greater than 6.0 including a 7.1 magnitude.

The Government has also declared a State of Atomic Power Emergency in relation to the Fukushima nuclear power plants. Thousands of residents are being evacuated from a 10 kilometer area around the nuclear plants north of Tokyo. The Prime Minister says a small amount of radioactive material has been released into the air after technicians were forced to release gases from the reactors in a bid to lower pressure.

The level of destruction is still not clear and is likely to be some days before a clearer picture emerges as to the extent of damage. The most affected areas are near the coastal city of Sendai in Miyagi Prefecture which has a population of one million and is 300 km northeast of Tokyo. The Government says more than 1,231 buildings have been destroyed and another 4,000 damaged. Approximately 1,450 roads, eight railways and 22 bridges are damaged or washed away. An irrigation dam has reportedly burst sweeping away houses in Fukushima.

The Government is currently putting the number of casualties at 464 with 771 people missing but the extent of the destruction along the lengthy stretch of coastline suggests the death toll could rise significantly. The media reports that a ship carrying 100 passengers washed out to sea and four passenger trains have been lost. More than 59 out of 207 fires have been extinguished but 148 still rage out of control.
National media says 215,000 people are seeking shelter in emergency centres across the country but it is reported that there is not enough blankets, food and water. The Government and local officials have distributed 14,650 blankets. About 25,000 blankets have been received from the private sector. More than 4 million homes are without power.

**Tsunami threat Pacific-wide**

The earthquake in Japan also triggered a pacific-wide tsunami warning that included Taiwan, Indonesia, Russia, Philippines, the Pacific Islands, and as far away as Hawaii, Mexico, and Colombia. Despite the predicted threat there was limited impact reported in most places and all tsunami warnings have now been withdrawn.

In the Pacific, most National Disaster Management Organizations (NDMO) withdrew their tsunami alert by the morning of 12 March. The OCHA office in Fiji has contacted the NDMOs in Nieu, Marshall and Cook Islands, Samoa, Tokalua, Fiji, Tonga, Kiribati and Vanuatu and all have reported no impact. Vanuatu and Tongo both reported small waves of about 50 cm.

In Papua New Guinea, there are reports that unusually high tides caused minor flooding in low lying areas in Manus and Wewak on the northeast. The Boram hospital in Wewak is reportedly badly damaged when it was flooded by waves and fifty patients had to be evacuated. The OCHA Humanitarian Support Unit is assessing the situation and is looking into reports of casualties.

### III. International Assistance

The United Nations Secretary-General has expressed his deepest sympathies and says Japan is one of the most generous and strongest benefactors, coming to the assistance of those in need the world over. He says the United Nations stands by the people of Japan and will do everything it can to help.

The Government of Japan has accepted offers of assistance from Australia, United States, Republic of South Korea, New Zealand, Germany, Singapore and Mexico. It has also agreed to the deployment of a United Nations Disaster and Assessment (UNDAC) team.

The United States team includes 200 rescue and medical specialist including USAID staff. Teams from the Republic of Korea, Mexico, New Zealand, Germany and Singapore include in total 145 search and rescue specialists and 30 dogs. Australia is sending 72 specialists and 22 tons of rescue and medical equipment. China and the European Union are preparing for deployment.

Emergency search-and-rescue teams from 39 other foreign countries remain on standby. Telecoms sans Frontiers (TSF) is sending a team to assess the communications and provide emergency telecommunications assistance.

The Government of Japan requested the USA military in country to assist with relief efforts. The U.S. military has also redeployed several ships towards Japan to provide emergency assistance and the USS ‘Ronald Reagan’ will be used as a landing pad for helicopters.

### IV. Coordination

A nine-member UNDAC team is currently mobilizing for deployment. The team will assist the Government of Japan’s efforts and coordinate the international Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams, as well as assist with assessments and environmental hazard analysis.

Information from the Government of Japan, including situation reports can be found at http://www.kantei.go.jp

Regular updates are being posted on Virtual OSOCC.

The US Pacific Command has established a website http://community.apan.org/hard/japan_earthquake/ that is posting sitreps from the PACOM Joint Operations Centre. The Pacific Disaster Centre is also presented.

### IV. Contact

Please contact:
The mission of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is to mobilize and coordinate effective and principled humanitarian action in partnership with national and international actors. http://ochaonline.un.org

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