



UN PRESS RELEASE

UN supports the Government of Papua New Guinea in its earthquake response efforts

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Relief supplies are starting to be distributed in earthquake affected areas of Papua New Guinea, with water, food, shelter, medicine and the provision of health services identified as the priority needs.

“We are working closely with the Papua New Guinea government to coordinate the earthquake response to ensure that relief supplies and services meet people’s most pressing needs, and reach the communities that need them most,” said UN Resident Coordinator, Gianluca Rampolla.

Mr Rampolla said a lack of information from affected areas and disparities in information that is available has been a challenge to coordinating aid efforts. However, the development of a draft response outline document by the PNG National Disaster Centre (NDC) with support from the UN is expected to address many of the challenges the response has been facing.

NDC Acting Director, Mr Martin Mose, said all information relating to the earthquake and affected areas must be channelled through the NDC to be processed accordingly for an effective response. “We need reliable information to make good decisions for an effective response, and we must continue to work together with partners to achieve this,” said Mr Mose.

Over half a million people have been affected by the 7.5 magnitude earthquake that struck the Highlands region of PNG on 26 February, destroying homes and infrastructure, triggering landslides, and affecting water sources. According to the National Disaster Centre, 270,000 people are in need of humanitarian assistance, however, this figure may rise as more information becomes available. Enga, Gulf, Hela, Southern Highlands and Western Highlands provinces have all suffered damage, with Hela and Southern Highlands worst affected. Out of this, 37,000 need urgent assistance. Understanding the full extent of the impact of the earthquake in remote or mountainous areas is severely challenging as physical access to many affected areas remains limited.

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The United Nations through its agencies and partners have distributed emergency shelter materials to 200 households in Southern Highlands and Hela provinces. Bottled drinking water mobile water purification units, water storage tanks, and food packs have also been distributed by partners.

The UN has also sent vaccines to Hela, Southern Highlands, Enga and Western Highlands provinces, which will be used to immunize infants and pregnant women, to prevent an outbreak of disease. A health emergency team visited Hela and Southern Highlands provinces last week to provide immediate medical assistance, assess damage to health facilities and plan for the rapid resumption of life-saving health services.

Safe Spaces for vulnerable women and young girls are being established, and dignity kits are being distributed.

Last week, a team of emergency experts from the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) deployed to PNG following the Prime Minister's declaration of a State of Emergency, to assist the PNG Government in assessments, response coordination, logistics and information management. The team will deploy to Mt Hagen, Mendi and Tari tomorrow (Tuesday 13 March) to augment the government-led response coordination.

"The UNDAC is working closely with the NGOs and UN agencies who are in the field, and are supporting the provincial administration to strengthen the response to get aid to those who need it as quickly as possible in a highly challenging operating environment," said Mr Rampolla.

Situation updates from the PNG Disaster Management Team Secretariat are available here:

<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/papua-new-guinea/document/papua-new-guinea-75-earthquake-situation-report-1-10march2018>

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