**Press Feature**

**For Immediate Release**

**Caribbean building stronger communities with Tsunami Ready**

**Bridgetown, Barbados, June 2020.** Earlier this year Lisa Henzell was moved to tears while watching a video clip of young children being evacuated from a preschool in the coastal community of Carenage in Diego Martin, Trinidad and Tobago. Not because the preschoolers were in danger but because of their enthusiasm during a tsunami evacuation drill.

Ms. Henzell, Communications Technician at the Diego Martin Regional Corporation, Disaster Management Unit, was volunteering and taking part in the drill as part of Tsunami Ready, a voluntary, performance-based programme designed to help build stronger communities through awareness and preparation for tsunamis.

“It’s amazing to see what these children go home with to their parents as a result of being involved in a tsunami exercise like this. These children really loved being part of the process and by going home and sharing with Mum and Dad they can teach them something. It's very powerful that these children are included,” she explained.

Tsunami Ready is part of the project, “Strengthening Capacities of Early Warning and Response for Tsunamis and Other Coastal Hazards in the Caribbean”. It is sponsored by the European Commission Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO); through its Department's Disaster Preparedness Programme (DIPECHO). The project is being implemented by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO/IOC) and its Caribbean Tsunami Information Centre (CTIC), as well as the Caribbean Disaster Management Agency (CDEMA), as an implementation partner and the University of the West Indies Seismic Research Centre (SRC).

**Raising awareness of tsunamis**

One component of the project is creating and raising awareness of tsunamis and promoting an improved understanding of emergency response systems. This has been done within a framework which has provided specific benefits to five countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominican Republic, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. General initiatives to support other CDEMA Participating States, the wider Caribbean and adjacent regions and the global tsunami network coordinated by the IOC have also been provided.

Sadie-Ann Sisnett, Project coordinator explained, “The overall project is designed to enable communities and empower them to know what they need to do in the event of a hazard like a tsunami. We have begun to educate people more on the effects of a tsunami and how they can best prepare and help themselves in the event of a tsunami warning.”

Communities in the five Caribbean countries applied and were selected to participate based on their vulnerability to a tsunami, such as being low-lying coastal communities. They are: St. John’s City (Antigua and Barbuda); Sherman’s, St. Lucy to Mullins, St. Peter (Barbados); Puerto Plata, and Sabana de Palenque (Dominican Republic); Union Island (St. Vincent and the Grenadines); and Carenage (Trinidad and Tobago).

The project started in 2018 and ended in June 2020. According to Ms. Sisnett key outputs included the creation of inundation maps and evacuation maps for each community, as well as the provision of communication equipment, and signage for evacuation routes, assembly points and tsunami hazard zones.

The communities also undertook extensive public education, conducted drills, and formulated an emergency operations plan (EOP). “The communities themselves, once they were well-engaged definitely took part and the awareness was there including what they can do to keep themselves and their families as safe as possible. So we were sure in those communities that there would be increased awareness,” the project coordinator noted.

**Communities “have worked so hard”**

Communities that have implemented these and other measures will soon be recognised as Tsunami Ready by IOC-UNESCO. “The ultimate goal is that these countries, that have worked so hard to get everything done in a year and a half, can see the outcome of their work and get that Tsunami Ready recognition status,” Ms. Sisnett added.

In Barbados, for example, (from Sherman’s, St. Lucy to Mullins, St. Peter) the placement of signage along the designated areas is expected to be completed shortly. In addition, Dave Hurley, Chair of the St. Peter District Emergency Organisation (DEO) explained, “Persons can expect to see the placement of hazard maps and other pertinent information being placed in active areas such as the surrounding supermarkets, schools and the bus terminal.”

In order to maintain the official designation and promote sustainability communities have to conduct three public education activities and a drill every year. Mr. Hurley said that his community was keen to do so. “The St. Peter DEO under the guidance of the Department of Emergency Management in Barbados will continue its usual drills and information sharing within the community.”

**Commitment and dedication of community stand out**

When asked what stood out to him about the Tsunami Ready process, Mr. Hurley said the level of commitment and dedication. “The memorable thing for me was the commitment and dedication shown towards the initiative by those who participated, specifically by the fellow DEO members. They took the initiative very seriously and that level of support and enthusiasm was very encouraging.”

Ms. Henzell also spoke about the dedication of her community in Carenage, Trinidad. “The community embraced it. It's so important to have the community work together and this is what they did. ”

She was also excited to be a part of Tsunami Ready. “I have a passion for emergency management. Trinidad and Tobago are now learning how absolutely necessary it is, and how important it is to be prepared, mitigated, and responsive. We can't live without the emergency management industry in the country. Being part of Tsunami Ready can help save lives and communities, as well as build community character.”

When asked what he would say to other communities in Barbados who might be thinking about becoming Tsunami Ready, Mr. Hurley suggested, “I would encourage all communities to get on board so that we can have as many Barbadians exposed to and knowledgeable in the area of tsunami readiness. One can never be over prepared when it comes to Mother Nature.”

On her part, Ms. Henzell would urge leaders to recognise how much more cost effective it is to be prepared and mitigated than it is to respond. “When I last checked there was a ratio of 1:7, meaning that for every $7 spent in response you could have spent only $1 in preparation and mitigation. With preparation comes lessened impact.”

Reflecting on the future of Tsunami Ready, those preschoolers who took part in the evacuation drill in Carenage come to Ms. Henzell’s mind. “These little kids have a lot longer to live here than I do and they are learning about and preparing for the event of a tsunami at a young age. That could only be positive with regard to community presence and participation in the future.”

**-ENDS-**

**CAPTIONS:**

**IMG\_20200205\_103247913\_HDR -** Members of the Carenage community in Trinidad and Tobago taking part in a tsunami evacuation drill held earlier this year.

**IMG\_20200211\_120631450 -** As part of the Tsunami Ready process assembly point signs were erected in the participating communities including this one in St. Johns, Antigua.

**About Tsunami Ready**

Tsunami Ready is a programme that helps build stronger communities through awareness and preparation strategies that will save lives from tsunamis. It’s a voluntary, performance-based, community recognition programme with guidelines to establish a standard level of community capability to mitigate, prepare for, and respond to tsunamis. Communities that meet the guidelines are recognized as Tsunami Ready by IOC-UNESCO.

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