

Savaia Lefaga - Samoa's first tsunami ready village

Savaia village, on the southern coast of Upolu, will be recognised by the U.N.E.S.C.O Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (I.O.C) as Samoa's first Tsunami Ready community during a ceremony today at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (M.N.R.E), T.A.T.T.E Building.

The Chief Executive Officer of M.N.R.E and Chair of the Disaster Advisory Committee, Ulu Bismarck Crawley, said that "the Tsunami Ready program is critical in identifying gaps in tsunami preparedness and response at the village level and to guide the implementation of tsunami related capacity

strengthening programs.

Savaia has been selected as the pilot village for this program as it has already completed the community disaster and climate risk management program and had participated in the I.O.C's Exercise Pacific Wave 2017 (P.A.C.W.A.V.E17).

This program will be up-scaled to become a multi-hazard readiness recognition program for Samoa". Samoa is the first Pacific Island Country to implement the program.

To achieve the recognition, Savaia had to meet 10 guidelines covering hazard assessment, tsunami signage, evacuation mapping and planning, education and outreach, and 24hrs x 7days

communications and response planning. The achievements were put into action through a community exercise that was part of the as part of I.O.C's P.A.C.W.A.V.E17.

The U.N.E.S.C.O-I.O.C Tsunami Ready pilot is performance based community recognition program modeled after the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration National Weather Service's successful TsunamiReady® Program.

Approved in 2015 in the Caribbean and globally recognized in 2017, it is being piloted in interested countries of the UNESCO IOC's Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (PTWS) in 2017

and 2018. The Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System encompasses 46 countries, covering the Pacific Ocean and its marginal seas spanning more than 20,000 kilometers, and over history, has suffered 75% of the world's fatal tsunamis.

"Tsunamis wreak havoc locally and can also cross ocean basins with deadly waves that take 15 hours to reach Samoa. But in the Pacific, 99% of our casualties have been caused by local tsunamis that attack in minutes, and it is for these that tsunami education, awareness, and preparedness beforehand to be Tsunami Ready will save lives," said Dr Laura Kong, Director of the International Tsunami

Information Centre (I.T.I.C).

The U.N.E.S.C.O I.O.C office in Suva and I.T.I.C, a partnership of U.N.E.S.C.O I.O.C and the U.S N.O.A.A, are working together to facilitate pilots in the Pacific. Currently, Mexico and Guatemala in Meso-America, Ecuador in the South East Pacific, and Tonga and Vanuatu in the South West Pacific have indicated interest.

In February 2017, Cedeno, Honduras, a small coastal town known for its seafood, and in May, Ostional, Costa Rica, a small coastal town visited by many tourist to observe endangered sea turtle nesting, were recognized as Tsunami Ready communities.