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PRESS RELEASE

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Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre aims to Improve Tsunami Warnings in the Pacific

Pacific countries should now be able to make more informed warning decisions and take tsunami evacuation and other safety measures. This is the result of new and enhanced advisory products from the Hawaii-based Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre (PTWC) that have come into effect on October 1st 2014. Based on an earlier decision by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO through its Intergovernmental Coordination Group for the Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System, the PTWC has ceased nearly 40 years of *warning* and *watch* services for the Pacific, and regions beyond. Instead, the PTWC will provide enhanced tsunami products placing countries under various threat levels based on forecast of tsunami amplitude or wave heights. The new products will include detailed forecast levels of impact along coasts, but no longer have alert levels (such as Tsunami Watch or Tsunami Warning). With this change, the definition of alert levels becomes the sole responsibility of the National Tsunami Warning Centre of the particular country. The improved service is the culmination of a seven-year intergovernmental process coordinated by IOC of UNESCO. The new tsunami products cater to 46 countries, covering the Pacific Ocean.

The new products are aimed at improving the response capability of a country and particularly help national warning authorities to provide advanced notice of potential local tsunamis while reducing the numbers of areas warned unnecessarily.

Transition to the new products will place countries in a better position to assess national threats and decide on the best course of action for the protection of lives and infrastructure. Both text and graphic products are included. The readability of the text products has been improved, as well as the order and type of information provided. The graphic and statistical products provide information at a much greater level of detail than text allows. They include maps that show the forecast directionality of the tsunami energy, the forecast position of the initial wave through time, as well as the expected maximum wave amplitudes offshore and at the coast. These maps can help to identify the threat quickly and clearly when time is of the essence.

The International Tsunami Information Center (ITIC) has worked closely alongside IOC-UNESCO to build warning decision-making capacity in all Pacific Countries and guide the

transition. A series of regional trainings and informational sessions were hosted by Chile, China, Ecuador, Fiji, El Salvador, Mexico, New Zealand, the United States and Vanuatu.

An international tsunami warning system for the Pacific was established in 1965 by IOC-UNESCO following the deadly tsunami that hit the coasts of Chile, U.S.A, Japan and the Philippines in 1960. The purpose of the Intergovernmental Coordination Group is to facilitate the speedy dissemination of alerts across the region and to support countries' ability to respond to and mitigate tsunamis locally. The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Pacific Tsunami Warning Center (PTWC) serves as its focal operational warning center, while the ITIC serves as the technical assistance centre, to monitor and recommend improvements to the system and to assist countries in strengthening their system.

Seventy-five percent of the world's fatal tsunamis occurred in the Pacific Ocean, with 99 percent of fatalities resulting from tsunamis that struck land within minutes.

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