

Tsunami Symposium

20 April 2015

Good morning everyone.

First and foremost I want to provide you a heartfelt welcome to Hawaii and thank you for making this event a priority.

I'd also like to thank our federal partners, especially NOAA and the International Tsunami Information Center (ITIC) who organized, and are hosting and sponsoring this event. For the past 50 years, NOAA and ITIC have worked tirelessly to ensure we have the very best tsunami warning and mitigation system in the world.

Events such as these are a rare opportunity where you bring together representatives from the military, law enforcement, government agencies, international community and industry partners. It is a time to learn, but it is also an extraordinary opportunity to come together and take on the really hard challenges we face in the future. You are the ones who have the knowledge, the skill, and the ability to help us prepare for that future and keep us on the right track.

No matter what our vocation, we tend to divide the world into specific geographies – countries, regions, areas of operations, markets, etc. But natural disasters ignore those lines that we have neatly drawn on a map and therefore require us to work together as a global community, not just a regional one.

And the threat is great...we don't have to peer very far back in history to see the devastation that can arise from Mother Nature. In 2004, we were rocked by one of the worst natural disasters in recorded history. Over 230,000 lives were lost in 14 countries as a massive tsunami impacted a large geographical area in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

In response, USPACOM provided Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief as a part of Operation Unified Assistance, utilizing 49 US aircraft, numerous ships, and smaller vessels delivering several million pounds of supplies to affected regions. The hospital ship USNS Mercy was also dispatched to support relief efforts providing medical services to over 70,000 people. USAID estimated the value of the PACOM response alone was over \$245M.

And that was just PACOM – the 2004 tsunami required a significant international response and demonstrated that no country has the capability or capacity to effectively respond alone. We must all plan, prepare, and work together to improve tsunami warning and respond to its aftermath. We've made great progress over the years, but there is certainly more that can be done.

I'd like to encourage you to help the PACOM attendees better understand how we might improve coastal resilience in the Pacific and make sure we never have a casualty count like we observed following the Banda Aceh earthquake and resulting tsunami ever again. I can certainly understand another large tsunami is inevitable, but I refuse to accept that there should be such high loss of life for these types of events; as we now have the technology and communications systems today to adequately provide warnings to most areas well in advance. We must now work to make sure these warnings have adequate dissemination, are timely, accurate, and invoke the appropriate response from the decision makers to protect human life and property.

You can help make that happen; we have the right people with the right knowledge and skills, so let's get at it!

Thank you.