

TSUNAMI INTERNATIONAL NEWS COVERAGE – MAY 16, 2006

HEADLINES:

GENERAL:

XINHUA GENERAL NEWS SERVICE- Pacific Tsunami Center Ready For Exercise: Pacific Tsunami center in Hawaii is making all preparations ready for a tsunami warning scenario Wednesday. According to Radio New Zealand International, Pacific Tsunami center said the exercise is to test countries around the Pacific of abilities to respond to a real emergency situation. The exercise, named Exercise Pacific Wave, will involve 28 countries. Since the 7.9-magnitude earthquake hit Tonga May 3, the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center has experienced a spike in replies to invitations about the test that were sent out by a U.N. agency two months ago. The organization's geophysicist, Stuart Koyanagi, said Tuesday earthquakes will be simulated in Chile and on Taiwan's southern coast, and fake tsunami warnings will be issued to all countries participating in the test. Koyanagi said the organization is providing the information and it is up to the individual countries to set up procedures for an emergency situation. He said the inter-governmental oceanographic commission offers training in emergency procedures.

AP - Amid Deadly Reminders, Philippines Should Brace For Tsunami Threats, Officials Say: Although it escaped the deadly 2004 tsunami that ravaged its neighbors, the Philippines should brace for killer waves because it lies in a geologically dangerous region and has a recent history of tsunami devastation, officials said Tuesday. The Philippines is among more than two dozen countries joining an unprecedented drill on Wednesday to test a tsunami warning system in the Pacific Ocean. A Pacific warning system has been in place since 1965, but a full ocean-wide exercise has never taken place. "It's important always to be prepared, that we do not expose people to hazards of disastrous events," said Renato Solidum Jr., head of the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology, or Phivolcs, which monitors volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and tsunamis. "That's better than having to do a search and rescue later," he said. During the drill early Wednesday, the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Hawaii will send out warnings about mock earthquakes off the Chilean coast and Luzon island in the northern Philippines that are powerful enough to set off a tsunami across the vast ocean.

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Pacific Tsunami Center Ready For Exercise
May 16, 2006 Tuesday

Xinhua General News Service

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He said the inter-governmental oceanographic commission offers training in emergency procedures.

Koyanagi added that the entire exercise would be canceled if a real, magnitude-7.0 earthquake or higher were to happen anywhere in the Pacific during the drill.

Amid Deadly Reminders, Philippines Should Brace For Tsunami Threats, Officials Say
By JIM GOMEZ, Associated Press Writer

May 16, 2006 Tuesday
Associated Press Worldstream

BUHATAN Philippines- Although it escaped the deadly 2004 tsunami that ravaged its neighbors, the Philippines should brace for killer waves because it lies in a geologically dangerous region and has a recent history of tsunami devastation, officials said Tuesday.

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During the drill early Wednesday, the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Hawaii will send out warnings about mock earthquakes off the Chilean coast and Luzon island in the northern Philippines that are powerful enough to set off a tsunami across the vast ocean.

Governments will test if and how fast they receive the warnings and how rapidly they are relayed down domestic emergency alert systems. While other countries will stop at that, the Philippines will stage an evacuation of residents in the far-flung coastal village of Buhatan in Santo Domingo town in Albay province, 340 kilometers (210 miles) southeast of Manila.

Isolated by mountains and distance, normally laid-back Buhatan was a beehive of activity on Tuesday as Phivolcs personnel installed roadside metal signs pointing the way to safety during the drill. Huge streamers announced the "first-ever trans-Pacific tsunami drill" called "Exercise Pacific Wave 2006." Children milled around, gawking at outsiders and journalists.

"We're so happy some people are advising us how to deal with such a disaster. I won't be as nervous if it does happen," said Sonia Siapno, a 54-year-old housewife.

Simplicio Balmas, a 74-year-old retired fisherman with 11 children, understood the urgency of the drill and has been walking briskly lately to be able to join the mock evacuation despite his arthritis. Balmas said he saw how a powerful typhoon brought walls of seawater crashing on Buhatan, killing 13 villagers in the early 1950s.

"I don't want to see that scene again. There were so many dead people and people looked so helpless," he said. "I know we're doing a lifesaving exercise, but I still feel nervous," he said as he stood by the sun-splashed Albay Gulf, its waves gently slapping the shore.

Buhatan, sandwiched between the gulf and the Philippine Sea, is often lashed by typhoons and has been hit by ashfalls and debris from the nearby Mayon volcano. A narrow road leading to the village was partly blocked by landslides from a storm last week. Despite lurking dangers, there is no police station, hospital, fire station or telephone lines. Some villagers rely on cell phones or simply rush to a town nine kilometers (five miles) away aboard motorcycle taxis during an emergency.

While the villagers are no strangers to typhoons and volcanic eruptions, hardly anyone was aware Buhatan could be hit by a tsunami until Phivolcs officials explained the nature of the tsunami drill, said Rene Arante of Phivolcs.

Ajith Weerawardena, a meteorologist from Sri Lanka and one of the foreign officials observing the drill, said he traveled to the village to learn something that could be used to save lives in his country. He lamented there was no early warning system when the 2004 tsunami struck Sri Lanka, killing about 39,000 people and damaging 40,000 houses.

"If there was a warning system during that time, we would have rescued a lot of people," he told The Associated Press.

An archipelago of more than 7,000 islands, the Philippines is flanked by the Pacific Ocean to the east and the South China Sea to the west with undersea trenches potential quake triggers running alongside its coast on both sides. The country has been struck by about 40 tsunamis in the past 400 years, Solidum said.

A 7.9-magnitude quake generated tsunami waves in the Moro Gulf in the south in 1976, killing about 3,700 people. Another powerful earthquake set off by a local fault whipped up killer waves that killed 78 people on Mindoro island, south of Manila, in 1994, Solidum said.

Simona Opitz
Information Officer
Office of the Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery
One UN Plaza
New York, NY 10017
Tel: 212-906-6928
Mob: 917-345-4352
e-mail: Simona.Opitz@undp.org
www.tsunamispecialenvoy.org