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Countries bordering on the Pacific Ocean will test their capacity to handle a major tsunami in an exercise from 15 to 17 February, held to identify possible shortcomings in the Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System, established under the auspices of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC).

Dubbed PacWave17, the exercise foresees several scenarios for earthquakes off the coasts of Chile and Peru, Colombia and Ecuador, Philippines, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu for countries to choose from. Alerts will be sent to the national focal points of each country taking part from the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center (PTWC) in Hawaii (USA) and the Northwest Pacific Tsunami Advisory Centre (NWPTAC) in Japan.

Populations will not be evacuated during the exercise, which will test the relay systems set up to transmit the warnings and the reactivity of the focal points in the event of a crisis. In keeping with the new procedures established by the Intergovernmental Coordination Group for the Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System, national authorities will be the first to be alerted by a bulletin from the PTWC and/or the NWPtAC. Other alerts will follow, providing information about developments.

This will mark the first involvement of the South China Sea Tsunami Advisory Centre in such an exercise. It will follow two scenarios: The first concerns a tsunami off the coast of the Philippines affecting Brunei Darussalam, China, Malaysia, Thailand and Viet Nam. The second scenario focuses on a tsunami occurring off the shores of Indonesia impacting Malaysia and the Philippines.

UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission established the Intergovernmental Coordinating Group's Pacific Tsunami Warning System in 1965, five years after a deadly tsunami hit the coasts of Chile, the U.S.A, where it led to the death of 61 people (in Hawaii), Japan, where it killed 142 people, and the Philippine, where at least 21 died. The purpose of the Group is to coordinate the establishment of tsunami warning systems in the Pacific and promote national risk assessment programmes, the dissemination of alerts, and countries' ability to respond to and mitigate tsunami incidents locally.

About 76% of the world's deadly tsunami occurrences take place in the Pacific Ocean and connected seas. On average, one destructive local tsunami occurs in the region every year or two while a Pacific Ocean-wide tsunami hit the region several times per century. Five deadly tsunami have hit the region over the past eight years: Samoa and Tonga were hit in 2009, Chile in 2010 and 2015, Japan in 2011 and the Solomon Islands in 2013.

More about PacWave17 (<https://eu.vocuspr.com/Tracking.aspx?Data=HHL%3d8%2b78%3d6%3eLCE2%3e2%3a3%401-GLCE270%3a&RE=MC&RI=5776758&Preview=False&DistributionActionID=41031&Action=Follow+Link>)

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