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First test of UN-backed tsunami warning system to be held in the Mediterranean



Aerial view of the vast destruction of the Indonesian coast caused by the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004

2 August 2011 –

Thirty-one countries are set to take part next week in a United Nations-backed test of the tsunami early warning system in the North-Eastern Atlantic, the Mediterranean and connected seas, which have experienced strong seismic activity over the years, although less frequently than in the Pacific Ocean.

The warning system was first established in 2005 by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) established under the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)).

The purpose of the exercise to be conducted on 10 August is “to ensure effective communication between regional and national centres and tsunami warning focal points,” according to a news release issued by UNESCO.

The exercise will include sending test messages via electronic mail, fax and the Global Telecommunication System from the Istanbul Observatory and Earthquake Research Institute (KOERI, Turkey) to all the national centres and tsunami warning focal points in the region.

“This should reveal possible dysfunctions in the dissemination of warnings,” stated UNESCO. “Indeed, the fast transmission of data and reactivity of national centres and country focal points are crucial for the effectiveness of the entire tsunami warning system.”

Seismic activity in the region includes a powerful earthquake in the Azores-Gibraltar Fault zone and subsequent tsunami that destroyed the city of Lisbon in 1755, as well as the 1908 tsunami that took the lives of 85,000 people in Messina, Italy. Weaker tsunamis have been observed more recently, including one generated off the coast of Algeria in 2003.

Taking part in next week’s test will be Belgium, Bulgaria, Cape Verde, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Kingdom.

The Tsunami Early Warning System for the North-Eastern Atlantic, the Mediterranean and connected seas is one of four regional systems which are coordinated by the IOC globally. Similar systems already exist for the Pacific and Indian oceans and for the Caribbean.

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