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## Full-scale test today of Caribbean tsunami warning system

***Thirty-two countries\* will participate in a full-scale tsunami alert exercise in the Caribbean on 20 March 2013. The goal is to test the reaction capacity in countries of the Caribbean and adjacent regions, including the East Coast of Canada and the United States, the Gulf of Mexico and Bermuda. The exercise was organized under the auspices of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC).***

According to the scenario of the exercise, an earthquake measuring 8.5 on the Richter scale will strike 90 km off the coast of Oranjestad, Aruba, in the Caribbean Sea, generating a tsunami on 20 March at 13:02 (coordinated universal time). The fictitious alert message will be sent by the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center (PTWC) and the West Coast and Alaska Tsunami Warning Center (WCATWC), triggering local tsunami response plans. The test is designed to determine whether Caribbean countries are ready to respond in the event of a dangerous tsunami.

The goal is to test the Tsunami and other Coastal Hazards Warning System for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions, which was established in 2005 by the countries of the region in collaboration with IOC, ensuring that the national focal points responsible for the dissemination of the alert and first responders receive timely warning. Previous experience underlines the crucial importance of rapid transmission of information to minimize the damage caused by tsunamis.

Over the last 500 years, 75 tsunamis have occurred in the Caribbean. This figure represents about 10% of the entire number of oceanic tsunamis in the world during that period. Tsunamis have killed more than 3500 people in the region since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (source: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NOAA). In recent decades, an explosion in population growth and the number of tourists in coastal areas have further increased the region's vulnerability.

Simulated tsunami exercises have been organized previously in the Pacific in 2008 and 2011 and in the Indian Ocean in 2009 and 2011. The Intergovernmental Coordination Group of the Tsunami and other Coastal Hazards Warning System for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions (ICG/CARIBE EWS) was established in 2005, replicating the model of the Pacific, Indian Ocean and Northeast Atlantic systems.

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\*\*Aruba, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Curaçao, Dominica, Dominican Republic, France (Martinique, Guadeloupe, St Martin, Guyane), Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Netherlands (Bonaire, Saba, Sint Eustatius), Nicaragua, Panama, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Sint Marteen, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom (Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Turks and Caicos), United States

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