



# AITAPE EARTHQUAKE - PAPUA NEW



## GUINEA

*By Department of Provincial and Local Government Affairs*

*National Disaster Management office*

### **1. Introduction**

This report presents an outline of the situation of Aitape Earthquake in the Sandaun Province of Papua New Guinea.

### **2. Background**

On Thursday 10th January 2002 at 9.15-p.m. local time, a shallow earthquake was recorded at latitude 3 degrees south and 142 degrees east near Aitape, adjacent to the Sissano Lagoon. The magnitude of the earthquake was recorded at 6.8 on Richter scale and occurred 15 -km radius of Aitape town at a depth of about 7 km.

The shallowness of the earthquake explains the intensity with which the earthquake was also felt along the locations from Vanimo to areas as far as Wewak. The earthquake was the failure on the north -south trending faulted subjected to east -west compression.

### **3. General Situation**

The earthquake caused several major damages mainly on semi-permanent houses and water tanks. Ground cracks and landslides indicated the closeness of the epicenter to Aitape. The normal after shocks as hinted by the PNG Geophysical Observatory continued for several days, however, there was no record of any abnormal fluctuation within the sea level for any possible tsunami event.

### **4. Inventory of damages**

#### **4.1 Houses destroyed**

The report received from the District administration stated that more than 222 houses and 1 classroom were destroyed.

## **4.2 Damaged water tanks**

A total of 145 water tanks were damaged. Other damages reported were 2 Copra dryers, several electricity poles, computers, photocopiers, fridges, fans, televisions, shops and 600 bricks prepared for water tanks were also damaged.

## **4.3 Casualties**

There was 1 casualty and 3 major injuries reported, however many minor injuries were not reported.

# **5. Main findings**

- The worse affected areas were those within the vicinity of a 15km radius of Aitape where immediate assistance for shelter is required.
- Major damage was done to Public Institutions like Raihu Hospital Out Patient and Labour ward buildings, schools, semi permanent houses and galvanized water tanks.
- No tsunami was reported this time but from the experiences of 1998 tsunami people moved away from the coast to higher grounds in anticipation of another tsunami.

# **6. Emergency Relief Recommendation**

The immediate needs at this stage are to replace damaged water tanks for Public Institutions, such as the; hospitals, schools, and buildings for public servants as well as the churches.

# **7. Response Actions Undertaken**

## **• Provincial Level**

Upon receiving news of the earthquake, a Provincial Administration assessment team was immediately deployed to the impact areas to assess the situation and the extent of damages caused. The District Administrator for Aitape District led the assessment team comprising of technical officers and catholic Mission personnel.

A final report on the extent of damages and areas mostly affected has been compiled and is submitted to the National Disaster Management Office and other appropriate organizations/departments for further deliberation and appropriate action were necessary.

## **• National Level**

The Director General of the National Disaster Management Office and a representative from PNG Geophysical Observatory accompanied by Provincial authorities and the Catholic Mission personnel flew into the affected areas on the 12/01/02, for a physical

inspection. The Director General was in the affected areas from the 12-15th January 2002 (4 days) assessing the situation and also conducting public awareness, as there was widespread fear and panic amongst the people affected as the earthquake evoked memories of the 1998 tsunami caused by a similar earthquake.

A cabinet submission for K3.1M for relief operations has been submitted to the Minister for Provincial & Local Government Affairs, Hon. Mathias Karani for cabinet 's approval.

## **8. Conclusion**

The damage caused by the recent earthquake has evoked the memories of the 1998 tsunami disaster in the minds of the people. Coupled to that there have been a lot of damages to properties, particularly the drinking water for the Education and Health Institutions. Some definite actions are needed to assist the affected people.