

5 March, 2017

CARITAS NETWORK RESPONDS TO POWERFUL EARTHQUAKE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Caritas Australia, the Catholic Church's international aid and development agency, with its church partners on the ground, has started supporting affected communities in Papua New Guinea's central highlands, following the 7.5 magnitude earthquake which struck last week.



PNG locals displaced by the earthquake in central highlands. Photo: Milton Kwaipo/Caritas

Strong aftershocks shook the mountainous region again on Monday, a week after the first quake.

Caritas is preparing to deliver emergency assistance including basic supplies like food, water and first aid, as well as supporting long-term needs like shelter.

Pope Francis has expressed his heartfelt solidarity with all those affected by this natural disaster.

"Informed of the tragic loss of life and the destruction of property caused by the earthquake in Papua New Guinea, His Holiness Pope Francis expresses his heartfelt solidarity with all those affected by this natural disaster," the Vatican has said.

"He prays especially for the eternal repose of the deceased and for the healing of those injured."

It's estimated around 150,000 people remain in need of aid. The quake damaged major infrastructure in the country's remote highlands, including; hospitals, an airport, houses, schools, churches and roads. More than 30 deaths have been confirmed so far.

Four provinces have been affected, including the Southern highlands, Hela Province, Enga Province and the Northern half of Western Province. The Government of Papua New Guinea has declared a national state of emergency. The extent of the devastation has reportedly taken days to emerge because of the area's remoteness – about 500km from the capital Port Moresby.

Caritas Australia's Disaster Response and Management Officer, based in PNG, Milton Kwaipo has been on the ground assessing the extent of damage in Hela Province.

"Water sources have been contaminated and this also includes clean and safe drinking water. These communities depend on water tanks but now have little if any drinkable water," Mr Kwaipo said.

"There is a great need of help at this moment. There is a need for assistance in terms of food, water and medicine.

"Many families have also been badly affected by the landslides. Some are also scared to go to their gardens and collect food because of the continued tremors."

If you would like to assist the people of Papua New Guinea, you can donate to the Caritas Australia Pacific Emergency Appeal by calling 1800 024 413 or by visiting www.caritas.org.au/pacific-appeal

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