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## **CARITAS RESPONDS FOLLOWING DEVASTATING EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMI IN SULAWESI**

The Caritas international network, part of one of the largest humanitarian networks in the world, is responding with emergency assistance, following a powerful earthquake that rocked central Sulawesi, Indonesia on Friday.

The magnitude 7.7 quake struck just off the coast of Donggala in Central Sulawesi, triggering an unexpected tsunami, which devastated the city of Palu, leaving a trail of destruction in its path. Caritas Australia's partners, Caritas Indonesia/Karina and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) are on the ground.

Caritas Australia's Senior Programs Co-ordinator for Emergencies, Richard Forsythe, says the disaster destroyed homes and businesses in Palu and also affected remote parts of Sulawesi.

"We are concerned that emergency teams have not yet reached all impacted areas, where there are no communications, and so the extent of the damage and lives lost isn't yet known," Mr Forsythe said.

"Strong aftershocks have also continued to hit the city of Palu, making it hard for residents struggling in the aftermath of such a devastating quake. At Caritas Australia we want to express our solidarity with the people of Indonesia, they are in our thoughts and prayers at this difficult time."

Catholic Relief Services' country manager in Indonesia, Yenni Suryani said the images coming out of Palu are "horrifying" and bring back memories of the devastation caused by the region's 2004 earthquake and tsunami.

"One of the lessons we learned from that disaster is that it will take time to learn the full scope of destruction," Ms Suryani said.

"The government is to be commended for their immediate response and the work they are doing to get information out quickly. Knowing that time is of the essence, our partners are racing to overcome extreme logistical challenges to get to the scene as fast as possible."

Ms Suryani added that with the airport damaged, getting access to Palu and Donggala has been problematic.

"Responders and local aid groups are having to drive overland for 10 to 12 hours. This means a bottleneck for relief supplies in coming days," she said. "Those long hours on the road are going to mean hours lost in getting assistance to people who need it in the next few days. Another option will be sea routes. The Ministry of Transportation is sending in relief by ship from North Sulawesi."

CRS's local partners Caritas Makassar and Muhammadiyah Disaster Management Centre (MDMC) are en route to Donggala and Palu in Sulawesi. Caritas Indonesia - Karina continues to monitor the situation and has established a coordination meeting with the Commission for Socio-Economic Development of Manado Diocese and Makassar Archdiocese. Both dioceses are very close to the affected area.

"I'm worried about people who might have been washed away. Several mosques, a shopping mall and many houses have collapsed. The impact is significant, and as soon as our local partners reach affected areas and establish communication we'll know more about the extent of the destruction and people's most urgent needs," Ms Suryani said.

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