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Full-scale test of Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System to take place on 12 October

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Paris: Almost seven years after the devastating tsunami of 2004, more than 20 nations* will participate on 12 October in a full-scale exercise to test the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System. This exercise, organized under the auspices of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, will also see responsibility for the issue of advisories handed over to the countries of the region through a new regional tsunami advisory service.

The scenario established for the "Exercise IOWAVE 11" re-enacts the events of 26 December 2004, with a 9.2 magnitude earthquake off the North West coast of Sumatra (Indonesia), followed by an ocean-wide tsunami. This simulated wave will cross the Indian Ocean in 12 hours to strike the coast of South Africa. Bulletins will be issued by the new Regional Tsunami Service Providers (RTSPs) in Australia, India and Indonesia**.

UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova will mark the transition of responsibility for the tsunami warning system with a video address to the authorities of the three countries on 12 October (8.30 a.m., Paris time).

The exercise aims to evaluate the system's operational capacity, the efficiency of communications among the different actors, and the state of preparation of national emergency services. The test will also include the evacuation of coastal communities in several countries, notably India and Malaysia.

The Indian Ocean nations decided to establish an Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (IOTWS) in the wake of the 2004 catastrophe. They requested that UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission establish an Intergovernmental Coordination Group to provide a governance mechanism for the new system, which became partially operational in 2005. Since then, bulletins have been issued to 28 Indian Ocean nations by the Japan Meteorological Agency and Pacific Tsunami Warning Center. They will continue to provide this service until the end of 2012, at which time an evaluation of the new regional advisory service will be carried out.

*To date: Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, France (La Réunion), India, Indonesia, Iran, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, Timor Leste, Yemen.

** as well as the Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (RIMES) and the Interim Advisory Service providers, Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA) and Pacific Tsunami Warning Center (PTWC)

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