

## Papua New Guinea earthquake update



Map Sources: ESRI, UNCS.  
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Map created in Jan 2012.

Source: <http://reliefweb.int/map/papua-new-guinea/papua-new-guinea-location-map-2013>

### The situation.

On 26 February 2018, a devastating M7.5 earthquake struck the highlands region of Papua New Guinea, leaving more than one hundred people dead, hundreds more injured, and hundreds of thousands in need of urgent humanitarian assistance; yet, the disaster continues to receive very little global media coverage and the consequent response has been slow.

Now more than three weeks on, with the main roads finally open and some commercial airport operations returning to normal, limited relief supplies are finally getting through to a few of the most affected communities. Yet in contrast, many others, because of remoteness and inaccessibility, are only just being reached by outside assessors.

'Why wait so long for help, and why so little attention from the outside world?' you may well cry...

### The geography.

Despite the scramble to reach settlements by the few needs assessors on the ground – representatives from the United Church were among the first into Hela Province, kindly helicopter-dropped into the region by ExxonMobil - and the rush to assemble emergency supplies in the national capital, Port Moresby, the highlands of Papua New Guinea remain difficult to traverse at the best of times.

The region was only recently connected to the coastal centres of this vast country with the advent of air transport – missionaries first arrived into the southern highlands in 1952 – and today, dispersed, highland communities still hug precipitous mountain slopes or dwell deep within out-of-the-way valleys, several days walk from provincial urban centres.



*Koema Aid Post, Southern Highlands  
Photo credit: Rev John Ovia, United Church  
Assembly Office*



*Student dormitory, Bernie Collins  
Bible College, Southern Highlands  
Photo credit: Rev John Ovia, United  
Church Assembly Office*

### The impact.

The earthquake made what was difficult mobility almost impossible in the harsh terrain - extensive landslides blocked roads and buried properties and people while they slept. The main quake occurred at 3.44am and survivors report being literally shaken out of bed by the intensity. And with ongoing aftershocks, the population has been left traumatised and understandably agitated by the delayed response. It is reported that even in the provincial capital of Southern Highlands, Mendi Town, substantial emergency supplies have yet to be received. And understandably, tensions are mounting across the region, with reports of targeted violence already.

### The dilemma.

Relief is not that far away - many international non-government organisations have pre-positioned stock in Mt Hagen, a neighbouring highlands provincial capital unaffected by the quake - but the hurdle remains: how to reach the most affected people in each province – in logistics terms, undertaking the ‘last mile’ of distribution.

### The church.

Almost 96% of the population of Papua New Guinea state that they are Christians (2011 census), and virtually every community in the highlands has at least one church. Church leaders are also highly respected members of any community, with detailed knowledge of the people that they serve. Operationally independent, they also have the trust of the communities in terms of the allocation and distribution of relief. The most vulnerable, regardless of circumstance, would come first.

### The collaboration and anticipation.

For the last thirteen years, the seven mainline churches in Papua New Guinea - the Anglican Church of Papua New Guinea, Baptist Union of Papua New Guinea, Catholic Church, Lutheran Church, Salvation Army, Seventh Day Adventist and United Church in Papua New Guinea have been working together under the church partnership programme (CPP). This partnership has given rise to collaborative actions across five social and development-related thematic areas: Health; Education; Peace and Prosperity; Gender and Social Inclusion; and Disaster Risk Reduction.

Coincidentally and somewhat fortuitously, members of the Disaster Risk Reduction teams from each of the seven churches had been together at a week-long training workshop just ten days before the Highlands Earthquake. Such close, and recent collaboration, both professionally and socially, meant that it was natural for the churches to undertake a joint response immediately after the quake.



*The Mt Hagen relief-and-response meeting*

### The disappointment and despair.

Even with such deep understanding, partnership and church-network outreach, the task remains enormous and frankly, despairing. There has not been the offer of substantial monies nor assistance coming forward. The Government of Papua New Guinea declared a State of Emergency on 1 March and announced that 450 million Kina (£108 million) would be needed for immediate relief and longer-term recovery. That money is just not available at the national level, and to date, interest from afar has been meagre at best.



*Yaken United Church, Elementary School, Southern Highlands  
Photo credit: Rev John Ovia, United Church Assembly Office*

PAPUA NEW GUINEA THE HEARTBEAT OF PNG

# Post-Courier

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## STATE OF EMERGENCY DECLARED

**Government to provide K450 million for relief and restoration to earthquake devastated areas in the Highlands**

BY GORETHY KENNETH

Enga province, Cultural last weekend and disaster relief operations for road and service restoration operations. Prime Minister's Office announced yesterday. Chief Cabinet had approved the establishment of a committee authority that would manage relief and reconstruction efforts during a three-year period in 2018 system are ready. Mr. O'Shea said that his emergency committee of Parliament would be called upon to approve the legislation setting up the emergency authority.

The rest of the funds will be channelled through local NGOs and other organisations to help those people. Members of the committee include the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Ministers for Finance, Health, Education, and Provincial Development. A formal contract will be signed with the NGOs to provide relief and reconstruction services.

The K450 million for immediate relief and restoration will be divided as follows:

- ROADS AND BRIDGES: K20M
- HEALTH SERVICES: K20M
- EDUCATION FACILITIES: K20M
- WOMEN SERVICES: K10M
- COMMUNICATION: K10M
- EMERGENCY SERVICE REFRESH: K10M
- FINANCIAL LOGISTICS, RELIEF CARE: K10M
- MANAGEMENT FOR MISCELLANEOUS: K10M

At FERNAMATA, Governor of Highland Province, Minister of Provincial Development and Infrastructure, Mr. O'Shea said that his emergency committee of Parliament would be called upon to approve the legislation setting up the emergency authority.

THE K450 million for immediate relief and restoration will be divided as follows:

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The plight of the highlanders following the earthquake has not received the publicity that it deserves, yet, over 400,000 people are in desperate need of help now. But the chances of finding adequate assistance at this delayed stage remain as remote and distant as some of the devastated communities – communities who have been left largely to fend for themselves.

The State of Emergency declaration should be reissued: 'The Papua New Guinea Highlands Earthquake is an emergency... unnoticed'.