



## **European Union brings relief to the victims of powerful earthquake in Papua New Guinea**

**Port Moresby, 09 March 2018** – Following the 7.5-magnitude earthquake which struck Papua New Guinea on 26<sup>th</sup> February, the European Union is providing €110 000 (PGK 438 610) to channel emergency assistance to the affected communities in the heavily impacted areas of Southern Highlands and Hela provinces.

Moreover, an expert in water quality and waste management has also been deployed through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, to provide expertise to the UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team. Additionally, the European Union activated the European satellite mapping system Copernicus, which has provided 13 maps of some of the worst-hit parts of the country.

*"Thousands of people are in urgent need of aid after the earthquake hit the country. The European Union is providing emergency assistance to support the work of the first responders on the ground,"* said Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management Christos Stylianides.

This EU-funding supports the Papua New Guinea Red Cross Society in delivering life-saving aid through the distribution of emergency shelter and essential relief items, such as tarpaulins, blankets, sleeping mats, mosquito nets, kitchen sets, and hygiene kits, whilst also ensuring first aid kits and health assistance are provided to those in need. In light of the difficulty in accessing some of the affected areas and the breakdown of communication systems, the assistance also supports aerial assessments and the deployment of volunteers to impacted localities. The funding is part of the EU's overall contribution to the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

Overall, as many as 143 000 people are estimated to have been affected, including some 500 injured and 17 000 others displaced, according to IFRC. Some health facilities and schools are reported to have sustained severe damage. The full extent of the devastation however remains unclear as road accessibility and lines of communications in the already hard-to-reach areas have been broken off, gravely hampering efforts to conduct assessments and provide immediate support. At least 70 aftershocks have rattled the country since the earthquake, including one of 6.4 magnitudes on March 6<sup>th</sup> in Western Province, which killed a further 18 people. A state of emergency has been declared in the impacted provinces, namely Hela, Southern Highlands, Western, and Enga provinces.

### **Background**

The European Union together with its Member States is the world's leading donor of humanitarian aid. Relief assistance is an expression of European solidarity towards people in need around the world. It aims to save lives, prevent and alleviate human suffering, and safeguard the integrity and human dignity of populations affected by natural disasters and man-made crises. The European Commission through its European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) helps over 120 million victims of conflicts and disasters every year. For more information, please visit [ECHO's website](#).

The European Commission has signed a EUR 3 million humanitarian contribution agreement with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) to support the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF). Funds from the DREF are mainly allocated to "small-scale" disasters – those that do not give rise to a formal international appeal.

The Disaster Relief Emergency Fund was established in 1985 and is supported by contributions from donors. Each time a National Red Cross or Red Crescent Society needs immediate financial support to respond to a disaster, it can request funds from the DREF. For small-scale disasters, the IFRC allocates grants from the Fund, which can then be replenished by the donors. The contribution agreement between the IFRC and ECHO enables the latter to replenish the DREF for agreed operations (that fit in with its humanitarian mandate) up to a total of EUR 3 million.

### **For further information, please contact:**

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