

# THE GENESIS OF TSUNAMI WARNING SYSTEM IN THE REPUBLIC

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## THE TSUNAMI

On 26 December 2004, a tsunami, which originated in the region of Indonesia, following an earthquake off Sumatra, killed around 250 000 people in countries bordering

the Indian Ocean. The earthquake was of intensity 9.3 on the Richter scale, the second highest after the Peru earthquake in 1960 but the most deadly ever recorded.

## Impact on the Republic

The impacts on Mauritius, however, were not really significant. The fall and rise of sea level were observed on the coast. Sea water inundated some places mainly in the north causing an abnormal rise of sea level of the order of 1.1 m. Such coastal flooding is occasionally observed during the transition months of April-May and September-October when phenomenal waves originate in the far

south of the Mascarene Islands and reach Mauritius causing "*Raz de Marées*".

The December 2004 inundation, however, was not a normal event. In Rodrigues, the impacts were more noticeable. The rise was 1.6 m above Mean Sea Level (MSL). Part of Port Mathurin was flooded and sea water penetrated more than 500m inland, causing damage to some fishing boats.

## Indian Ocean basin countries caught unprepared

Besides its unprecedented magnitude, the tsunami of December 2004 will remain in history as the event which triggered instantaneously world attention to the urgent need of developing an efficient tsunami warning system for the Indian Ocean. When it

struck, the only warning most people in the region had was the sight of a giant wave heading towards them. Unlike the Pacific, the Indian Ocean did not have a system to alert residents of coastal areas that a tsunami was imminent.

## TOWARDS AN INDIAN OCEAN TSUNAMI WARNING SYSTEM (IOTWS)

To prepare countries to face future disasters of tsunami origin, world leaders called for a coordinated effort by the international community and the Indian Ocean countries to develop an end-to-end early warning system

for the entire Indian Ocean region. The International Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO led the international effort to develop an operational *Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System* (IOTWS)

## National Tsunami Warning System

The global system provides integrated end-to-end capabilities at the regional, national, and local levels within a multi-hazard framework.

Mauritius has benefitted much from this initiative. A seismograph has been installed at Vacoas and a *National Tsunami warning*

system has been established with the assistance and support of International

Organizations and friendly countries.

### **Sensitisation campaign in the Republic**

The sensitization campaign launched in 2010 is one of the major components of the warning system. The Mauritius Meteorological Services (MMS) has entrusted the "**Association pour le Développement**

**Durable**" (ADD) with the responsibility to undertake the task of developing a programme to make people more aware of tsunami and enhance preparedness in partnership with another organisation.