Beat: Miscellaneous

European countries to test preparedness for tsunami disasters

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USPA News - More than a dozen European countries, along with several countries in Western Asia and Northern Africa, will participate in an international exercise next week to test the region`s preparedness for a tsunami disaster, the United Nations (UN) said on Thursday. The exercise, named NEAMWave14, will be staged by countries around the Mediterranean Sea and along the northeastern Atlantic Ocean between October 28 and October 30. The exercise will be based on four simulated earthquakes that unleash two tsunamis in the Mediterranean Sea, one in the Atlantic Ocean and a fourth in the Black Sea.

Twenty out of 39 countries that are part of the so-called Tsunami Early Warning and Mitigation System in the North-Eastern Atlantic, the Mediterranean and connected seas (NEAMTWS) will take part in NEAMWave14. They are Croatia, Cyprus, Egypt, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Lebanon, Malta, Monaco, Morocco, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. "The exercise will be an opportunity to test the efficiency of the communication systems in charge of transmitting tsunami alerts and, in some countries, to ensure that the authorities in charge of public safety are prepared to face such a threat," UNESCO spokeswoman Isabelle Le Fournis said in an e-mailed statement. Most people are unaware of tsunami threats along the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean as tsunamis are typically associated with the Pacific Ocean, which is known for its `Ring of Fire.` Earthquakes in the past, however, have unleashed large tsunamis that devastated countries along the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, killing many thousands of people. In November 1755, an estimated 8.5-magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Portugal, generating large tsunamis that affected the region and causing seismic seiches in lakes as far away as Scotland. The earthquake and resulting tsunami, causing near total destruction of Lisbon, killed between 60,000 and 100,000 people in Europe. Thousands were also killed in Morocco and other towns of North Africa. Dr. Francesca Santoro, the NEAMTWS coordinator for IOC-UNESCO, said Thursday that the tsunami warning system, which was first tested in 2012, remains in a pre-operational phase. "This will most probably change in the next two years, also in preparation of the NEAMWave16 where we plan to have a full scale exercise with people evacuation," she said. Until NEAMTWS becomes operational, eight centers have been designated to provide tsunami alerts to NEAMTWS member states. A large-scale exercise was also carried out by the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System in September, just months ahead of the 10th anniversary of the 2004 tsunami disaster, which led to the system`s creation. A total of 24 countries participated in the September exercise, which included public evacuation exercises of coastal populations in several countries.

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