

Tuesday, 03 April 2007

### **TSUNAMI IN THE SOLOMONS SHOCK AND CONFUSION**

The whole nation, starting from the diocese of Gizo (run by the Dominicans friars for the past 50 years) in shock since the Terrible earthquake of the other day (7:30 am) The Diocese was preparing to receive the world youth day cross. It received instead a cross of a different kind and weight leaving the people of Gizo and surrounding Islands without shelter, clothes, water supply, food and medicines.

Gizo Island (350 Km from capital Honiara) is just one of the very many little islands making up the West Solomons, internationally famous for some of the best coral reef spots in the world. Much of the country's economy depends on the TAYO tuna industry as well as the logging industry of the west. Great damage therefore has been done not only to the tens of thousands left homes but to the national economy as well, hardly recovering from the past ethnic war and other recent unpleasant political confusing events.

The exact amount of the damage done will take more days to assess due to the breakdown of the already very poor communication network.

Some corpses have been seen at large at sea. Officially the dead are 24; 2 in Gizo a girl of 12 drowned and a lady was caught under her falling house. We know however that many are missing and unaccounted for.

The houses of Gizo town (5000 people) are all wooden and very few have a second floor.

In the many surrounding islands the fishermen live long the beaches in small hut made of 'bush materials'. They can easily be destroyed without great damage to the people inside. The majority of the islands too are not mountainous, few and very low hills are used for gardens with a very 'stingy' and ungenerous soil. The Solomon western people (generally of darker looks) have managed to live for centuries on the abundance of the fish from the sea. The low geographical make up of the islands made it so that too little has remained available for them to survive on. The Tsunami literally destroyed all houses, gardens and water sources leaving the people of the islands cut off from the rest of the world and unable to survive for long in this precarious situation. Many of these small islands too do not have the necessary conditions to favour coconut plantations so very useful in situation of survival. Perennial scarcity of water in normal circumstances became dramatic problem and drinking water becomes a real priority.

The cathedral of Gizo (made of solid bricks) was totally destroyed by the strong earthquake and by the following wave. The weak houses all swept away without deadly consequences for its people, but leaving all of them homeless waiting for survival aid on the hill tops

Survival is the most urgent of needs, reconstruction and rehabilitation can be something we will think about soon after we solve this.

We need to get drinking water to these Islands, clothing, food supplies and medicines. In the great panic, we still do not see any coordinated effort, we there fore decided to start as a School to do something immediately for one

of the Islands: SIMBO where one teacher (Mrs Dakey Doris) and some of our students come from. They received a visitor with the alarming news we mentioned. The island of Simbo is north east Gizo, not far from Nila and Bouvanguille islands. It has a population of about 2000 fishermen living in 5 villages. The village of TAPARAY with its 1000 people has been the most damaged being along the shore facing at Gizo Island where the Tsunami came from. The village has been totally destroyed, its reserves of water completely polluted by the wave, people lack everything: clothes, food, water.

The villages of RIGURU, NASURU, LENGANA AND NASASIMBO have been equally badly hit. Their people still live in panic on the hills waiting for the worse. Their source of income "the bush" is no more.

Our school in Honiara, the Don Bosco Technical Institute, has started a campaign of support for the victims, for this island and its five villages.

Some supplies have left today, but the boat was small and overloaded with people eager to join their dear ones left behind and bring some help. Very little space was left for the much needed supplies. Still we do not see anything organized in big scale.

We appeal to those who do not want to wait for the official machinery to start, please start with us, enable us to be there before anybody else...as soon as possible with water, clothes, food and medicines.

We will then organize something for reconstruction and rehabilitation with a better preparation.

Thanks to all those who want to help....

Happy easter to you all



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**Name: Salesians of Don Bosco: DON BOSCO PROJECTS, for tsunami victims island of SIMBO**

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