ANGUILLA FIRST CARIBBEAN TERRITORY TSUNAMI READY
Mitigating Loss Of Life

Anguilla is the first English-speaking Caribbean territory to be recognised as Tsunami Ready. The official status was accorded to the island at a special ceremony at the Wallblake Conference Centre on Monday, December 12. The event was chaired by the Hon. Othlyn Vanterpool, member of the Island Harbour community, and Elected Representative for that district where tsunami evacuation education has been a main focus by the Anguilla Department of Disaster Management.

In order to earn Tsunami Ready recognition, Anguilla established a 24-hour emergency operations centre; developed multiple ways to receive tsunami warnings and alert the public; developed a formal tsunami hazard plan; conducted emergency exercises; and promoted public readiness through community education.
Christa von Hillebrandt-Andrade said she was pleased that for the first time a jurisdiction, outside of the United States, was recognised as Tsunami Ready. “No coastal community can be tsunami proof, but if we are smart, we get ready to respond quickly and appropriately,” she stated. “If we are ready, we will avoid the horrific loss of life that we have witnessed in other areas of our world – the Indian Ocean, Haiti, Chile and, most recently, Japan, just to name a few. She said that Anguilla now had the necessary tools to minimise loss of life if and when a tsunami struck the island.

She reported that since 2005 the Caribbean Community had been working on the establishment of a Caribbean Tsunami Warning System under the UNESCO Inter-Governmental Coordination Group for tsunamis and other coastal hazards for the Caribbean and adjacent regions. Forty countries and territories in the region endorsed, in 2010, the establishment of a Centre in Puerto Rico; and a Caribbean Tsunami Information Centre is to be located in Barbados.

She said Anguilla was selected to be the first territory in the region for the implementation of an international pilot tsunami ready programme. She explained that, among other matters, in order for recognition to be given to Anguilla, the verification team had to ascertain that there was an office operating around the clock that could receive messages from the Pacific Warning Centre and transmit them to the community. A tsunami evacuation map was also an important consideration. The map, 2,000 copies of which were printed, shows in green the excavation points to where persons in Anguilla could move to high ground and safety.

Ms. Meade, Director of Disaster Management in Anguilla, said she was happy that the island had become the first international community or country to be recognised as tsunami ready having met the criteria. “We can appreciate that this is a continuous journey towards our state of readiness,” she said. “This milestone is one we ought to be proud of, but in no way can we allow complacency to set in. We now have to step up to this specific threat and be aware of the warning signs as the window for action or response can be small. We need to ensure that all persons are aware of the places that afford them the highest chances of surviving, how to get there and why the signs are positioned in that manner.”

Bill Proenza said the recognition given to Anguilla marked another significant milestone in the continuing tsunami mitigation efforts in the Caribbean and Western Atlantic Basins. “I congratulate the Governor, Anguilla’s Department of Emergency Management
Governor Harrison, who delivered the feature address, thanked and congratulated all who were involved in Anguilla becoming the first community outside the United States to have met the standards of tsunami preparedness. “Nobody in the world can be tsunami proof, but it is the degree to which we are prepared which will determine the impact of any tsunami on Anguilla,” he stressed. “The aim of being prepared is to reduce that impact of the tsunami when it comes. It will come at some stage. It might come tomorrow; it might come in ten years; it might not come for several generations, but history makes it very clear that it will come eventually and we need to be prepared for it.”

The Governor went on to explain some of the differences between the challenges that would face the people of Anguilla in the event of a tsunami, and those with which Anguillians were particular familiar in terms of hurricanes, tropical storms and flash floods, as well as the challenges of man-made problems.

Mr. Harrison emphasised that it was important to have the right evacuation procedures and structures in place, and regular check-ups to ensure that Anguilla was continuing to be tsunami ready.

A tsunami consists of a series of ocean and/or sea waves that could be generated by an earthquake, volcanic eruption, landslides or meteorite impact. In deep water, tsunamis can travel 500 miles per hour, equivalent to the speed of a commercial jet. As they approach the coast, the speed and distance between the waves decrease while the height increases.

The initial wave may arrive within minutes, but large waves and strong currents may continue to affect the coastal zones for hours. The wave height could be over 20 feet, destroying everything along its path.