INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION  
(of UNESCO)

Twenty-Third Session of the Intergovernmental Coordination Group  
for the Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (ICG/PTWS-XXIII)  

Apia, Samoa, 16–18 February 2009

ICG/PTWS Secretariat's report

This document has been prepared by the ICG/PTWS Secretariat. It is presented to the ICG/PTWS-XXIII for comments.
ICG/PTWS Secretariat's report

Since the ICG/PTWS last met in Guayaquil, Ecuador, 17–21 September 2007 (PTWS-XXII) extensive work has been planned and mostly carried out to implement the decisions and recommendations. In particular the newly established Steering Committee reviewed at its 1st meeting (PTWS-SC1) the PTWS and report of the PTWS-XXII, and defined deliverables to be prepared and presented to the next meeting of the PTWS (PTWS-XXIII). The PTWS Secretariat in due course had assisted the Steering Committee in the preparation of PTWS-SC1, and its documentation.

The Steering Group took exception in focusing its deliberations on the TOWS Recommendations and its implications for the PTWS. As Recommendation IOC/EC XL.I.6 requests inter alia "the ICG Chairpersons to work with the Member States and the TOWS Working Group towards developing harmonized working group structures that map easily across ICG and provide a foundation for inter-operability and further requests the ICGs and other subsidiary bodies identified in the TOWS report to consider carefully the report recommendations and respond, as appropriate, at the next meeting of the TOWS-WG".

The Chairman instructed the Secretariat to ensure deliverables as agreed during the PTWS-SC1 and the following ICG/PTWS-XXIII will meet the TOWS requirements. Therefore the achievements of PTWS XXIII, including the planning instruments (Medium Term Strategy, Implementation Plan) and the operational documents and structure (Users Guide, Working Group Structure) should be prepared in due time.

The TOWS Report therefore was providing guidance in the development of these documents, in particular the draft Medium Term Strategy 2009 – 2013. The PTWS-SC1 also had agreed that regionalization is a mechanism to improve the regional stakeholder ownership and to advance the system, with the development of a specific structure (Working Group or Task Team) in the PTWS Working Group Structure.

Since Recommendation XXII.6 delegates to the Steering Committee the faculty to "evaluate the need for provisional intersessional Working Groups as required in the following areas:

a. Monitoring
b. Assessment
c. Interoperability
d. Awareness
e. Regional",

the PTWS-SC1 reviewed the Working Group structure that was agreed at ICG/PTWS XXII and which had defined seven Working Groups:

a) Working Group One: Sea-Level Measurement, Data Collection and Exchange
b) Working Group Two: Interoperability of regional, sub-regional and national tsunami warning systems in the Pacific

c) Working Group Three: Pacific Emergency Communications and Technologies

d) Working Group Four: Rapid Near-field Recognition of Tsunamigenic Earthquakes and Associated Tsunamis

e) Working Group Five: South West Pacific Region

f) Working Group Six: Central American Pacific Coast

g) Working Group Seven: South East Pacific Region.

In preparation of PTWS-SC1, the Secretariat had invited member states to nominate members for above Working Groups. Since the response was slow, the Secretariat again reminded Member States of the opportunity to get involved in the PTWS. This again was not meeting the expectations raised at PTWS-XXII. The Steering Committee decided to submit a document on the PTWS Working Group Structure to PTWS XXIII. Ken Gledhill and Yohei Hasegawa prepared a draft which was submitted to the Steering Committee by end November 2008 and now is available as a working document (ICG/PTWS-XXIII/14). The new Working Group Structure will be presented by the Chair.

The Steering Committee also agreed to finalize and publish the:

- ITSU Master Plan
- PTWS Users Guide
- PTWS Medium Term Strategy 2009-2014
- PTWS Implementation Plan
- PTWS Working Group Structure

Lead by the former Chair of the PTWS, Mr Stephenson and Director ITIC Dr Kong, the ITSU Master Plan (IOC/INF 1124), was put in its final format for future reference and now is available to PTWS-XXIII in electronic form.

The ICG/PTWS XXII, through Recommendation XXII.6, had entrusted the Steering Committee to "develop a Medium Term Strategy including performance measures", the chairs since have developed the PTWS Medium Term Strategy 2009-2014, based on the draft Medium Term Strategy 2008-2013 as presented by Mr Stephenson at the PTWS-SC1. It is now made available to this meeting as document (ICG/PTWS-XXIII/12).

The Steering Committee had also agreed that “based on the PTWS Medium Term Strategy and the PTWS Users Guide, the ICG/PTWS Secretariat shall produce a first draft ICG/PTWS Implementation Plan and after review by the Steering Committee submit to ICG/PTWS XXIII”. Subsequently the Director PTWC was tasked with the role of finalizing the PTWS Users Guide document. The final contributions to the PTWS Users Guide now called Operational Users Guide for the Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (PTWS), were received by the Secretariat in February 2009, and subsequently was published. Since a final revision of some figures is still outstanding, hard copies of the present status of the Operational Users Guide for the Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (PTWS) are made
available to this ICG session only. The final document will be published as IOC Technical Series 87.

Because of this delay, the Secretariat now submits to the ICG/PTWS-XXIII only a generic draft PTWS Implementation Plan (IOC Technical Series, 86) that in particular requires further input from member states. The Secretariat regrets this unfortunate delay and proposes to develop it further during the intersessional period for the next meeting of the PTWS Steering Committee.

Recommendation ICG/PTWS XXII.6 charged the Steering Committee to develop the ITIC Work Plan for PTWS focused on the priorities of the PWTS Medium Term Strategy. Subsequently it was included as part of the Implementation Partnership Agreement agreed between UNESCO/IOC and NOAA on ITIC’s international activities.

As agreed at PTWS-XXII for the Exercise Pacific Wave 08, it was announced to Member States, and the PACWAVE 08 Manual (IOC Technical Series 82) published. This exercise was accompanied by extensive media activities by the IOC Secretariat, UNESCO and IOC’s ITIC to make member states aware of this important event, and to encourage non members to join the PTWS. The report of PACWAVE 08 is to become available as IOC/INF-1254 Exercise Pacific Wave ’08: Summary Report.

The Steering Committee had also instructed the Secretariat to extend invitations to several organizations with relevance to or interest in the PTWS to become a PTWS Permanent Observer. These were the following organisations:

CPPS
SOPAC
SPREP
WMO V and II
CEPREDENAC
UNDP
ASEAN
IUGG Tsunami Commission
ADRC
CAPRADE

The invitations were issued in due course, and the detailed response can be made available by the Secretariat.

As a matter of procedure, the Steering Committee had decided that there will be not face to face meetings of Working Groups before ICG/PTWS XXIII due to the short time available for them to meet after being established. All work should be advanced through email exchange. This was facilitated by the Secretariat. The Regional Working Group on Tsunami Warning and Mitigation in the Southwest Pacific Region, chaired by Ken Gledhill, New Zealand was deliberately asked to convene its 1st Meeting before the ICG/PTWS-XXIII. A report of this meeting will be introduced later by its Chairman.
In preparing for the next biennial programme and budget of UNESCO, the 35 C/5 covering the period 2010-2011, the Secretariat has successfully proposed to include in the draft document enhancements of the budget for staff and activities. Subject to approval of the General Conference of UNESCO, the Director General instructed the Executive Secretary of the IOC to establish at the UNESCO Office in Apia, to be based in Suva, Fiji a National Officer to promote IOC’s programmes, in particular on Tsunami Warning Systems and disaster risk reduction activities. This also responds to views expressed by countries in the South West Pacific which the Director General of UNESCO visited in spring of 2008.

The Secretariat has also been actively building new links or confirming old ones with institutions that promote, support or have an interest in the tsunami work of the Commission. So the established authorities charged with civil defense aspects, or disaster management are targeted to inform them about ocean-related hazards and risk. In that context the Head of the Tsunami Unit, Peter Koltermann and the Technical Secretary of the CARIBE-EWS, Bernardo Aliaga participated, together with the Associate Director of ITIC, Andres Enriquez, Chile in a Seminar on Civil Defense and Natural Hazards of the Interamerican Defense Board IADB, in Washington USA from August 27 – 28 August 2008. This raised the interest of civil defense and military bodies, and confirmed to review available command and response structures on the national level. In parallel the Secretariat informs and briefs UN and other organizations about the status, progress and achievements of the TWSs. The Inter American Development Bank in Washington was briefed on the work of the Unit in Latin America, both on the Caribbean and the Pacific coasts, and concepts of support actions are being discussed.

Although the countries of the Region South East pacific (RSEP: Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Chile) have been members of the Intergovernmental Coordination Group for the Pacific Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (ICG/PTWS) from its inception, the recent occurrence of seismic events able to generate tsunamis at regional level (ex Earthquake of Pisco - Peru, the 15 of August of the 2007) reminded and demonstrated the vulnerability of the region against this type of events. Tsunamis originated in the area near the RSEP coasts trigger the issue of warnings by the Pacific tsunami Warning Center (PTWC) and by the national centers. However, due to the little time to react in case of regional tsunamis the RPSE countries (Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Chile) have decided to advance quickly to enhance their communications systems and also to streamline and end-to-end system that includes population awareness and preparedness. The Permanent Commission of the South East Pacific (CPPS by its Spanish acronym) is providing key political support towards this goal. As well, the UNESCO Office in Santiago, a regional cluster for Education, is taking the initiative, together with the ICG/PTWS Secretariat and within the framework of the Regional Strategy for Education and Emergencies, of drafting a proposal towards the involvement of the Educational Sector in coastal hazards preparedness with initial focus on tsunamis. Under the report of RSEP you will get more information on several promising initiatives advanced by RSEP.

Finally, as Technical Secretary of the ICG/PTWS, I would like to take this opportunity in meeting here in Apia, Samoa, and in the South Pacific to invite its Island States to strengthen their relations with the PTWS, its Tsunami Warning
Centres and the ICG. In particular this invitation holds for joining the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO. The IOC has since 1965 coordinated efforts in the Pacific to protect countries, their coasts and their people from the tsunami hazard. For almost 40 years that effort has only covered the Pacific and its coasts, with services provided by the United States and Japan. Only the devastating Tsunami in the Indian Ocean on December 26, 2004 forced countries in all oceans to face this risk. The IOC since then has been successful in establishing Tsunami Warning Systems in three other oceans. Some of them are now close to operations. The PTWS of the 21st century needs all your support and engagement to face these challenges.