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Thomas Rachel: “Significant contribution to disaster protection“

Parliamentary State Secretary Rachel and Indonesian President Yudhoyono inaugurated the new centre of the tsunami early warning system in Jakarta

In future, people in Indonesia will be better protected from natural disasters.

The tsunami early warning system, which was developed thanks to significant contributions from German scientists, has now started its operation and entered a further two-year development and optimization phase. The Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and the Parliamentary State Secretary at the German Federal Ministry of Research Thomas Rachel (MdB) jointly inaugurated the early warning centre in Jakarta on Tuesday. Almost four years after the catastrophe of 26 December 2004, in which 230,000 people lost their lives, an effective technological solution for the protection of people is now ready for operation. In the next two years, Indonesian and German scientists will continue to develop and optimize the technology. The system will then be handed over to Indonesia completely in 2010.

“With its role in the development of the tsunami early warning system, Germany is making an important contribution to disaster protection in Indonesia and in other threatened coastal communities around the Indian Ocean”, Thomas Rachel said at the inauguration ceremony. The Parliamentary State Secretary thanked all participants for their great commitment and stressed that Indonesia is now in a better position to protect its citizens from tsunamis.

The new warning centre, which will be operated by the Agency for Meteorology, Climate and Geophysics (BMKG) in Jakarta, pools new scientific processes and technologies to create an early warning system that is unique worldwide. “This technology will enable authorities to issue quick and reliable warnings about approaching tsunamis”, Rachel said.

The so-called Decision Support System (DSS), which was made available by Germany, lies at the core of the new warning centre. It offers support, mainly in an automated form, for decisions on whether and where alarms should be sounded. The DSS pools all available information. Afterwards, the data is aligned with already calculated possible tsunami simulations on Indonesia's coasts.

All the components of the early warning system in Indonesia are now operational, although the sensor network needs to become even denser. During the joint development and optimization phase, the interaction between the various components will be improved. In addition, German and Indonesian research institutions and universities will train operators for Indonesia in the next two years. Not least, Germany and the Indonesian agency BMKG will work together to develop concepts to enable Indonesia to finance the system's operation and maintenance independently starting in 2010.

As part of its aid to the tsunami victims, the German Federal Government provided €45 million for the development of an early warning system. The installation process is taking place in close cooperation with Indonesian authorities and with UNESCO and its Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, which has assumed responsibility for coordinating a comprehensive early warning system for the Indian Ocean. The BMBF will provide a further €6 million up until 2010 for the optimization of the system and the transfer of operational know-how.

The following scientific institutions are working together closely under the leadership of the Helmholtz Association of National Research Centres, represented by the GeoForschungsZentrum Potsdam (German Research Centre for Geosciences; GFZ): the German Aerospace Center (DLR), the Foundation Alfred Wegener Institute (AWI), the Leibniz Institute of Marine Sciences (IFM-GEOMAR), the Research Centre Geesthacht (GKSS), the German Marine Research Consortium (KDM), the Federal Institute for Geosciences and Natural Resources (BGR), the Society for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), and the United Nations University in Bonn (UNU).