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UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction



**WORLD TSUNAMI
AWARENESS DAY**
5 NOVEMBER

World Tsunami Awareness Day 2023

[#GetToHighGround](#) [#TsunamiDay](#)

Fighting inequality
for a resilient
future

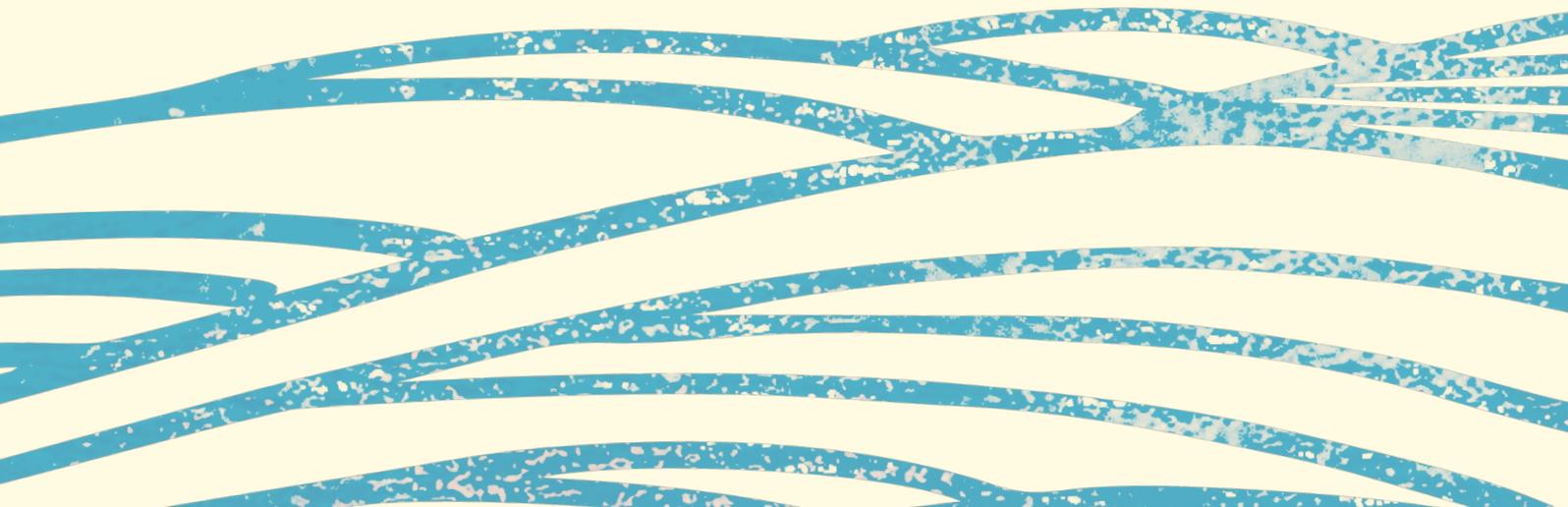


Introduction to the campaign

Adopted in December 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly, World Tsunami Awareness Day (WTAD) is set to take place on 5 November. The day aligns with the International Day for Disaster Reduction (13 October) and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (“the Sendai Framework”), which is the international agreement to prevent and reduce disaster losses. The purpose of WTAD is to raise awareness about reducing tsunami-related risks and enhance community preparedness.

WTAD 2023 takes place at the same time that the United Nations Secretary-General’s Early Warnings for All initiative’s implementation gets under way. The Early Warnings for All initiative seeks to cover every person on the globe with an early warning system by 2027 and closely aligns with Target G of the Sendai Framework, which likewise encourages expanding early warning and early action for everyone. WTAD 2023 also takes place during the same year as the Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework, an important opportunity to assess progress towards goals and targets on disaster risk reduction. As part of the Midterm Review, a high level meeting of the General Assembly took place in May 2023 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, where Member States adopted a political declaration to accelerate action on building resilience to disasters.

In 2023, the theme of WTAD will mirror the theme of the International Day of Disaster Reduction: **fighting inequality for a resilient future**. Activities will explore the reciprocal relationship between tsunamis and inequality: how inequality makes tsunamis more dangerous for certain populations and how the aftermath of a tsunami can drive vulnerable people further into poverty and exacerbate inequality. WTAD 2023 activities will focus on raising awareness about the underlying disaster risk drivers – **poverty, inequality and vulnerability** – that make tsunamis more deadly for those most at risk.



Background on tsunamis and inequality

Tsunamis can be terrifying and deadly. Globally, over 700 million people in low-lying coastal areas and Small Island Developing States are exposed to extreme sea level events, including tsunamis (World Health Organization, 2019). While tsunamis are rare, their impacts can be destructive. In the past 100 years, just 58 tsunamis have taken more than 260,000 lives, which equates to an average of 4,600 lives per disaster, a death toll that exceeds any other natural hazard (United Nations, 2022).

Like all disasters, tsunamis have an unequal and unique impact on the affected population. **Poverty levels, exposure, discrimination and other vulnerabilities all play a key role in determining who is likely to be affected and how.** For example, following the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 that affected 12 countries, Oxfam found that poor households were more likely to see their “flimsy houses” wash away, while the brick houses of richer households proved sturdier. Moreover, it took longer for “rescuers to reach poor villages in remote areas, which often lacked doctors or medical care” (Oxfam, 2005).

Specific populations – such as women, children and youth, persons with disabilities and older persons – often confront heightened challenges, both during and after a tsunami. Research found that during the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, women accounted for 70 per cent of the deaths. Many did not survive, possibly for cultural reasons, because they put the safety of other family members ahead of their own, or because they were less aware of how to protect themselves (Rahiem, Rahim and Ersing, 2021). The 2011 Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami offers another example of a population being disproportionately impacted. One study found that older persons represented 64.4 per cent of the total deaths, primarily due to reduced mobility, weak physical strength and delayed evacuation (Sawai, 2012).

Vulnerable populations often fare worse in the aftermath of tsunami. The fallout can push millions of people into poverty, making those already vulnerable the most likely to suffer. The loss of shelter after a tsunami can leave people exposed to insects, heat and other environmental hazards, as well as traumatic injuries and poor access to health care. As agricultural lands are often flooded post-tsunami, the shortages of food and loss of livelihoods place additional stress on people living in poverty. Some regions suffer sharp drops in income from tourism that further destabilize their economy. People living in poverty often do not have savings and lack access to critical services such as finance and insurance, which hampers their recovery even more.

Rectifying such inequality requires broad action, including ensuring that all people can access the information and services that can protect them before, during and after a tsunami. The main findings from the Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework call for an “all-of-society” approach to disaster risk reduction that makes space at the decision-making table and ensures all people can access that space (A/77/640). These efforts must include all the countries, communities and populations most at risk from the danger of tsunamis.



Disaster risk reduction requires an all-of-society engagement and partnership.



Call to action

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 calls for the following: “More dedicated action needs to be focused on tackling underlying disaster risk drivers, such as the consequences of poverty and inequality”. It states that: “Disaster risk reduction requires an all-of-society engagement and partnership. It also requires empowerment and inclusive, accessible and non discriminatory participation, paying special attention to people disproportionately affected by disasters, especially the poorest. A gender, age, disability and cultural perspective should be integrated in all policies and practices, and women and youth leadership should be promoted.”

To raise awareness and mobilize action, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction is using the 2023 WTAD to raise awareness about how tsunamis inordinately affect vulnerable people and people living in poverty. It will serve as a call to fight inequality for a resilient future for all.

WTAD tagline: [Fighting inequality for a resilient future.](#)

Social media hashtags:

- » [#GetToHighGround](#)
- » [#TsunamiDay](#)



Key messages

- » Inequality creates the conditions that lead to people becoming exposed and vulnerable to disasters, such as tsunamis. The poorest and most at risk are disproportionately impacted, which in turn worsens inequality. Reducing vulnerability to disasters includes addressing poverty, exposure and vulnerability.
- » A review of available data from tsunami events over a 20-year period (1998–2017) puts losses at 251,770 deaths and US\$ 280 billion in economic losses. This is compared with 998 deaths and US\$ 2.7 billion in recorded losses from tsunamis over the previous 20 years (1978–1997) (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2018).
- » We must accelerate the implementation of the Early Warnings for All initiative to ensure everyone on Earth is covered by early warnings in the next four years, prioritizing the last mile of communications to deliver warning messages to at-risk populations.
- » An early warning system can be effective only when the population is well aware of tsunami risk and knows what to do in case of an emergency. This means ensuring that at-risk populations have equal access to information and evacuation routes (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2022).
- » We can curb the destructive power of hazards – in other words, stop them turning into disasters – through careful and coordinated planning that is designed to reduce people’s exposure and vulnerability to harm.

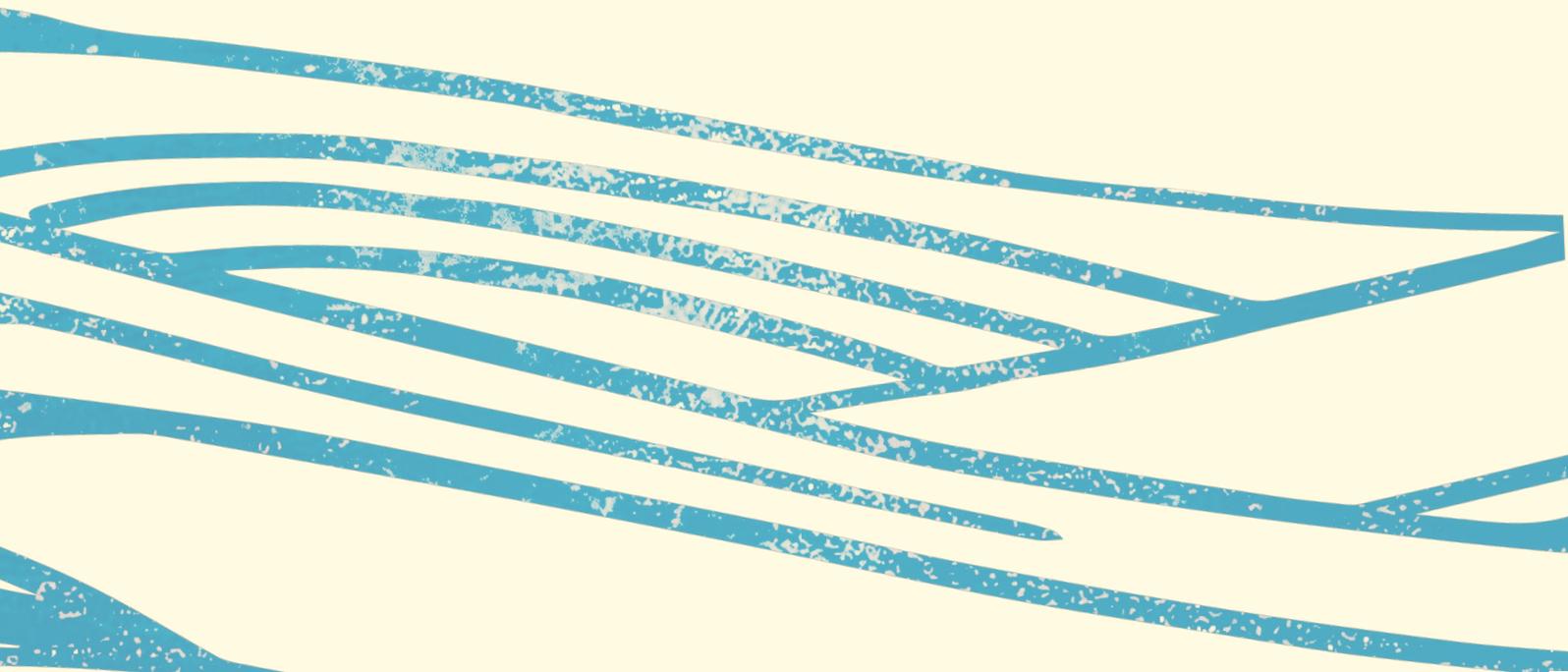


- » As part of WTAD and the Tsunami Ready programme by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (“IOC-UNESCO Tsunami Ready programme”), the #GetToHighGround initiative offers a chance to accelerate action on early warning systems for tsunamis.

- » WTAD plays an important role in promoting efforts to reduce tsunami risk through:
 - » the expansion and maintenance of tsunami early warning systems across the world’s oceans
 - » the IOC-UNESCO Tsunami Ready programme
 - » inclusion of tsunami risk in national and local strategies for disaster risk reduction (Target E of the Sendai Framework)
 - » an all-of-society approach to disaster risk reduction and tackling tsunami risk

- » Member States must prioritize their commitments to achieving the Sendai Framework and Sustainable Development Goals, especially the reduction of poverty and inequality, while addressing the dangers posed by tsunamis, with a focus on the most at-risk communities.

- » Countries must engage, empower and build the capacity of groups in all disaster risk reduction decision-making. Countries must ensure that the most at-risk populations, including older persons and persons with disabilities, are meaningfully included.



Resources

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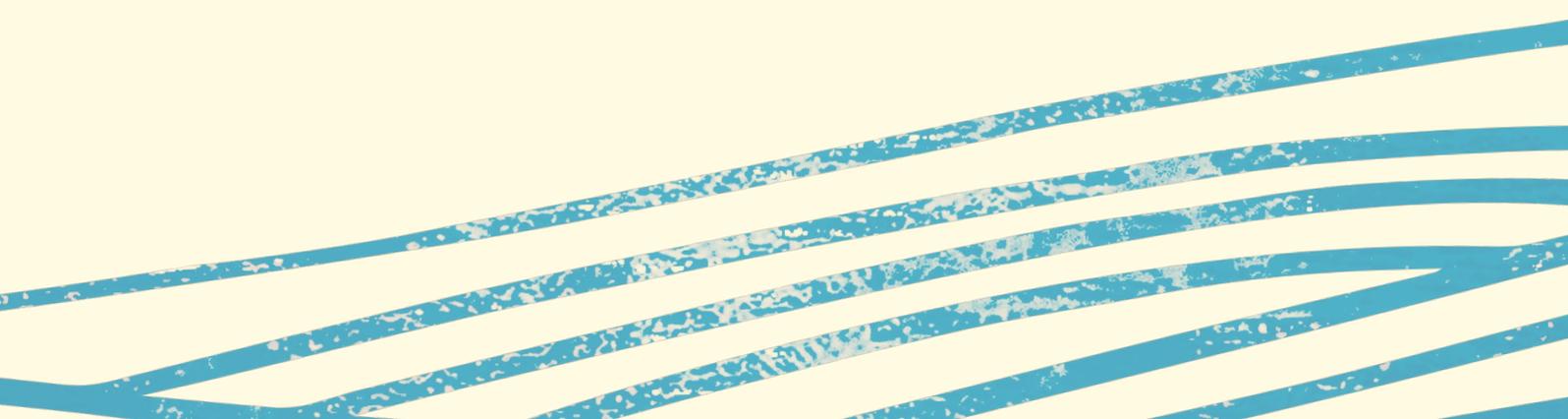
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