

Opening: Resilience of Coastal Communities in the North East Atlantic, Mediterranean Region to the Impact of Tsunamis and Other Sea Level-Related Coastal Hazards

Dear Participants,

It is with a great pleasure that we meet today to start the project on Resilience of Coastal Communities in the North East Atlantic, Mediterranean Region to the Impact of Tsunamis and Other Sea Level-Related Coastal Hazards.

Firstly, I would like to thank the European Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) for supporting this project. Also, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all of you who generously worked in the project proposal to make it successful.

This initiative is of paramount importance to our region. The NEAM (North-Eastern Atlantic, Mediterranean and Connected seas) region is an area where tsunamis are low probability events. However, low probability does not mean low impact specially when we know that the coastal area of this region is home to 116 million inhabitants and that the Mediterranean area became one of the worlds primary tourist destination.

Moreover, the importance of coastal zones in the economic activities of this region increases the vulnerability to tsunamis and increases the underlying risk factors. It is acknowledged that the potential for human and economic loss is severe. These facts tell us that we need countries to be ready and populations to be ready to respond to tsunamis.

The NEAM strategy is grounded on:

- Implementation of National Tsunami Warning Centers.
- Improving Tsunami Detection, Tsunami Forecasting and Dissemination of alerts
- Education and Awareness

There are forty member States of the IOC bordering the North-Eastern Atlantic, the Mediterranean Sea and Connected seas but not all member states established their national centres. This is a goal that we've been pursuing since 2005 but we are still far from our target.

Concerning Tsunami Detection, Tsunami Forecasting and Dissemination of alerts, there is a need to continuously improve the tsunami detection and forecast system. Giving that a tsunami generated in the Mediterranean can reach the shore in less that 15 minutes, we need better, and faster tsunami detection and we need to keep working to be able to more accurately predicting the likelihood of a tsunami and its impact, and speeding up warnings to those at risk, is a priority.

Education and Awareness are key ongoing efforts, most of NEAM coastal communities have less than half an hour to react or evacuate in case of a tsunami. This fact tells us that despite of improving alerts education is a key factor. We need to keep awareness. Tsunamis in our area not frequent and most of the population considers them as low probability events or rare events, so it is a challenge to raise awareness of the catastrophic potential of tsunamis. We need to sustain the collective memory not only on a local level but at a regional level.

With the support of the EU, and DG-ECHO we have the opportunity to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable coastal communities in North-East Atlantic and the Mediterranean countries to tsunamis and other sea-related hazards. One of the key deliverables of this project is to have selected communities in Greece, Malta and Turkey, Cyprus and Spain. Moreover, we expect that by the end of the project we will have Global Tsunami Ready Guidelines for use in the NEAMTWS region to get more and more Tsunami Ready Communities.

As chair of ICG-NEAMTWS, I am confident on the high-level commitment of all participants of this that will make this project a success. I look forward to the positive outcome of this workshop and the future outcomes of the project!

Lisbon, 17 December 2021



Maria Ana Baptista
Chair of the ICG-NEAMTWS