News
EarthBeat



Junno Arocho Esteves

View Author Profile

OSV News

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

Sydney, Australia — May 29, 2024

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Caritas Australia mobilized relief efforts to aid victims of a horrific landslide that devastated remote communities in Papua New Guinea.

"Our partners on-the-ground in Papua New Guinea are currently conducting a rapid needs assessment in the affected villages to determine the most urgent priorities," Caritas Australia stated on its website May 28.

"The recovery is expected to be long, and food, shelter, and clean water are amongst the most urgent needs for people who have lost their homes because of the landslide," the organization said.

The landslide struck the Pacific island's Enga province in the early hours May 24, leaving sleeping villagers barely any time to escape.

According to the Reuters news agency, government officials said more than 2,000 people are believed to have been buried. However, due to its remote location and the lack of recent census data, an accurate number of people living in the province remained unclear.

The island nation's defense minister, Billy Joseph, said an estimated 4,000 people were living across six remote villages in the landslide's path, Reuters reported.

Advertisement

Damage caused by the landslide to roads has hampered rescue efforts. In a statement released the day after the disaster, the United Nations Office in Papua New Guinea said that "access roads to the affected site have been damaged, as has communications infrastructure."

"The United Nations is monitoring the situation very closely, in collaboration with national and provincial government authorities, including other partners, to determine the extent of damage, casualties, and possible assistance that may be required for those impacted," the statement read.

Caritas Australia echoed those concerns and confirmed that "the affected area remains highly unstable, which is hampering search and rescue efforts."

"The ongoing search and rescue operations are facing challenges due to the hazardous terrain and the continuous threat of landslides, resulting in slower progress," Caritas said.

In a telegram released by the Vatican May 27, Pope Francis expressed his sorrow after learning "of the devastation caused by the landslide" and assured "everyone affected by this disaster of his spiritual closeness."

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, sent the message on behalf of the pope to Archbishop Mauro Lalli, apostolic nuncio to Papua New Guinea.

The cardinal said Francis offered prayers for the dead, "those who mourn their loss, and for the rescue of the many persons still missing.

"His Holiness offers encouragement to the civil authorities and emergency personnel as they continue their relief efforts, and willingly invokes upon all the divine blessings of consolation and strength," Parolin wrote.