

September 2022 – Joy Ayabe

Dear Family and friends,

Here is a public statement from our organization about the earthquake which hit the Highlands of PNG over the weekend.

12Sep - Earthquake Update

Situated on the Pacific Ring of Fire, those who live and work in Papua New Guinea are familiar with earthquakes. But earthquakes of 7.6 magnitude don't come along every year! When they do, everyone reaches out to family, friends, and colleagues to see if they are ok. Because SIL-PNG staff work in remote village locations where communication options are limited and transport may only be on foot or by air, it takes a concerted effort to get reports in after an event like this. It is with gratitude that we report that no SIL-PNG staff were injured during the 11 September earthquake. There are reports of damage to villages near the epicentre and a few reports of death and injury. The PNG Disaster Management Team continues to assess damage and discern appropriate responses. SIL-PNG is in contact with this team as well as a Member of Parliament for part of the affected area and has extended the offer of assistance in transporting the injured or flying in relief supplies. Language development work in the area represents SIL-PNG's longer-term contribution to the region.

News from specific locations near the epicentre:

Several SIL-PNG staff from villages near the epicentre shared stories from their areas. We've received reports of 1-2 people dead and small numbers of injured as well as houses damaged. An SIL-PNG team is facilitating a Culture Meets Scripture workshop near the epicentre. This team includes the translation advisor, who has worked in the community since 2004, and Scripture Access staff. They were confirmed safe yesterday.

Two houses belonging to a partner organization collapsed. Only one family was there at the time, and they were able to get out, no one was injured. SIL-PNG evacuated the wife and children, while the husband stayed to work with the community on next steps.

In the Aiyura Valley, where SIL's Ukarumpa Centre is located, a number of schools and institutions report damage to power and water systems, as well as to buildings. Cables providing internet to a significant portion of the country remain dysfunctional. Trucks were unable to transit the Kassam Pass for a time, but are now able to do so.

The infrastructure of SIL-PNG's Ukarumpa centre suffered widespread-but-limited damage. Most offices and homes had items fall off shelves and break; older metal water tanks broke or developed leaks; many plumbing issues have been reported; a few roofs were damaged; and there were a few cases of more significant structural damage. A great deal of work has been underway since shortly after the earthquake, with our Construction and Maintenance staff coordinating the response and undertaking the technical tasks. Many in the community are volunteering to assist with recovery efforts.

There are several specific things we are grateful for:

A church service was in progress at the Ukarumpa Centre when the earthquake hit, meeting at an outdoor location. No one was injured.

The Ukarumpa Centre's water system incorporates large metal tanks for storage and distribution. Only one tank was ruined, the rest held.

A building that had been undergoing construction had been sufficiently braced that it suffered no damage.

SIL Aviation reports that aircraft are undamaged, making scheduled and relief flights possible. The earthquake happened during daylight hours on a sunny day, enabling a lot of response work to occur on the day of the earthquake.

We are especially thankful to have heard of so little loss of life, despite the magnitude of the earthquake.

SIL-PNG will continue its recovery efforts, will remain poised to assist others as needs can be met, and will return as soon as possible to the work of language development, translation, literacy, and training in PNG.

Thank you for your prayers,

Blessings,

Joy