

## Press release: Early warning has its rewards



**Munich Re  
Foundation**  
From Knowledge  
to Action

### **Munich Re Foundation grants prize for early-warning system – €50,000 for optimised storm-warning system in the Kingdom of Tonga.**

Some 1,000 experts from over 140 countries gathered at the Early Warning Conference III in Bonn from 27 to 29 March 2006. The aim of the conference, which was organised by the UN ISDR (International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, Geneva) and DKKV (the German Committee for Disaster Reduction), was to promote early-warning systems and provide practitioners and decision-makers with useful tools.

In his opening address, former US President Bill Clinton, UN Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery, stressed the importance of this conference of experts in a phase marked by a rising number of extreme weather events. 2005 will long be remembered because of Hurricane Katrina, which in August killed more than 1,300 people and devastated the city of New Orleans, and the earthquake in Pakistan, which claimed nearly 90,000 lives in October.

On the evening of the first day of the conference, the Munich Re Foundation awarded a prize worth €50,000 to an early-warning system in Tonga. As part of the “early-warning communication system for the Kingdom of Tonga”, the prize money will go towards linking the island nation to the RANET warning system already in place in the Pacific. High-frequency radio links will improve forecasts and warnings even during severe storms, a fact that was hitherto impossible with satellite monitoring systems.

The prize for the early-warning system best tailored to the needs of people at risk was awarded at a reception given by the German Foreign Office. State Minister Gernot Erler emphasised that almost all the projects submitted were true to the motto of the conference “From concept to action”.

The Munich Re Foundation selected the winning project from a total of 130 projects submitted to the conference organisers. “Our intention was to close a gap in early warning”, said Thomas Loster, Chairman of the Munich Re Foundation. “Although international early-warning efforts have been stepped up considerably, there are still a number of bare patches on the map, especially in remote areas”.

The Kingdom of Tonga in the South Pacific comprises more than 150 islands, of which some 35 are inhabited. The island nation is regularly hit by tropical cyclones and floods. The chosen project, proposed by the National Disaster Management Office of Tonga and the local weather service, will allow improved forecasting and will reach the entire population of Tonga. The foundation, which was established by the global reinsurer Munich Re, selected this system because it is clearly defined, effective and can be easily reproduced elsewhere. Takai Maliu, a member of the National Disaster Management Office in Tonga: “Thanks to the prize, we can get to work immediately. We will now be able to implement the early-warning system even on our remotest islands in a little over a year.”

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