

Papua New Guinea Earthquake Triggers Landslides; at Least 30 Feared Dead

A magnitude 7.5 earthquake struck central Papua New Guinea early Monday local time, killing at least 14 people in landslides triggered by the tremor.

Unconfirmed reports said the death toll could be at least 30, but officials said it could be days before the final scope of the damage is known. BBC.com said reports of “extensive” damage are coming from the country, with numerous structures claimed by the large slides.

One woman in the town of Mendi said she feared “the ground might open up and swallow us” when her roof gave way, BBC.com reported via Reuters.

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The landslides cut off several roads, making it more difficult for officials to reach some of the areas where the damage was most severe, the report added. Networks and electricity were knocked out by the disaster, cutting off communication.

“There are massive, massive disruptions,” Hela Provincial Administrator William Bando told the Associated Press.

A Catholic priest told local media at least four children were among the victims, BBC.com also said.

“Our police station, courthouse, hospital ... even private houses have been ripped apart or sunk into the ground,” Philip Undialu, the governor of Hela province, told BBC.com.

Chris McKee, acting director of geohazards management for the Papua New Guinea government, told the AP that tens of thousands of people live in the forested highlands region affected by the quake. Porgera is the site of a large gold mine that employs more than 2,500 residents; the quake halted production at oil and gas plants and coffee plantations in addition to the mines, the AP added.

Papua New Guinea is located on the eastern half of the island of New Guinea, to the east of Indonesia. It is home to about 7 million people.

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