World Tsunami Awareness Day 2026: Be Tsunami Ready, Resilience Starts with You



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While tsunamis are infrequent in the Greater Caribbean, their consequences can be catastrophic, making preparedness an essential part of a broader approach to disaster risk reduction. The 2026 theme of World Tsunami Awareness Day, observed annually on 5 November, “Be tsunami ready: Resilience starts with you”, draws attention to the role of individuals and communities in reducing tsunami risk. However, preparedness cannot depend solely on individual action; it also requires accessible risk information, effective early warning systems and coordinated institutional support.

The region’s history shows why such preparedness matters. According to the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s National Centers for Environmental Information (NOAA NCEI) et al. (2023), forty-five (45) tsunamis caused damage across the Caribbean, Central America, Mexico and adjacent regions between 1530 and 2023, with nineteen (19) resulting in almost 6,500 deaths. Among the most devastating were the 1692 tsunami in Port Royal, Jamaica, which claimed approximately 2,000 lives, and the 1946 earthquake-generated tsunami in the Dominican Republic, which claimed approximately 1,790 lives. These figures show that even infrequent events can cause major loss of life.

Tsunami risk in the Greater Caribbean stems from its complex geological setting, where earthquakes along active tectonic plate boundaries, volcanic activity and submarine landslides can all generate them. The Eastern Caribbean, in particular, has several potential tsunami-generating sources. One example is Kick-’em-Jenny, an active submarine volcano located approximately eight (8) kilometres north of Grenada. The volcano is monitored by the University of the West Indies Seismic Research Centre (UWI SRC), which notes that although large explosions or landslides could generate tsunamis, an eruption is considered unlikely to trigger one at its present depth (UWI Seismic Research Centre, n.d.). This distinction is important: the presence of potential sources does not mean that a tsunami is imminent, but it reinforces the need for continuous scientific monitoring and preparedness.

Historical records also indicate how often such events can be expected. According to the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO (UNESCO-IOC) (2024b), the Caribbean

region can expect approximately four (4) destructive tsunamis per century. Although some areas have no recorded history of destructive tsunamis, all coastal areas remain potentially exposed. Preparedness is therefore essential for coastal communities throughout the region, including those with no recent first-hand experience of such events.

Protecting communities across so many coastlines and national borders requires more than local action; it depends on sustained regional cooperation. At the technical level, tsunami warning arrangements are coordinated by the Intergovernmental Coordination Group for the Tsunami and Other Coastal Hazards Warning System for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions (ICG/CARIBE-EWS), under UNESCO-IOC, which oversees tsunami-risk-related activities across thirty-two (32) Member States. Its work is organised around key areas including risk knowledge, tsunami detection and forecasting, warning dissemination and response capabilities. Together, these functions strengthen the different stages of the warning process, helping ensure that scientific detection supports timely community action (UNESCO-IOC, 2024a).

Regional exercises and community programmes help put these arrangements into practice. CARIBE WAVE, conducted annually, allows countries and territories to test their warning arrangements, identify communication gaps and strengthen institutional coordination; the 2026 exercise engaged more than 619,000 registered participants from 44 countries and territories (UNESCO-IOC, 2026). At the local level, the UNESCO-IOC Tsunami Ready Recognition Programme supports communities with risk assessment, public awareness and evacuation planning, and communities in Barbados, Belize, Costa Rica and Grenada, among others, have been recognised (UNESCO-IOC, 2024b). Together, these efforts bring preparedness closer to the people who must act on warnings.

However advanced a warning system may be, its effectiveness ultimately depends on the “last mile”: whether warnings are trusted, understood and acted upon quickly. In many tsunami scenarios, waves may arrive before official warnings do, so survival often depends on whether individuals recognise natural warning signs, such as strong or prolonged ground shaking, an unusual rise or withdrawal of the sea or a loud roar from the ocean, and act within the first critical minutes (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [UNDRR], 2026). Household emergency plans, familiarity with evacuation routes and regular participation in drills are what turn this awareness into timely action. Preparedness must also be inclusive, so that children, older persons, persons with disabilities, migrants and visitors who may need additional support during an evacuation are not left behind.

Enabling people and communities to act on warnings is a responsibility shared by national authorities, regional bodies and local communities. The Association of Caribbean States (ACS) contributes to this effort through its mandate to promote consultation, cooperation and concerted action across the Greater Caribbean. Through its Special Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction, the ACS provides a platform for Member States and Associate Members to exchange knowledge, strengthen institutional capacities and promote collaborative approaches to reducing disaster risk. The ACS also implemented the Caribbean Territorial Information Platform for Disaster Prevention (PITCA), which enhanced Member States’ capacity to receive and share geospatial information on hazards and risk to inform planning and decision-making.

The ACS’s contribution complements specialised mechanisms such as ICG/CARIBE-EWS and the UNESCO-IOC Tsunami Ready Recognition Programme. While those mechanisms coordinate technical warnings and local preparedness, the ACS facilitates policy dialogue, inter-institutional cooperation and knowledge exchange across borders. This multi-layered approach is critical in a region where hazard impacts cross borders and require coordinated responses.

The ACS’s work in this area aligns with the ACS Strategic Plan: Greater Caribbean 2035, which

identifies “Risk Reduction with a Climate Justice Approach” as one of its five strategic priorities. The Plan emphasises equitable disaster risk reduction systems rooted in participatory governance and accountable risk management, anchored in “the principle that resilience begins with people”, which closely echoes this year’s theme. This approach recognises that resilience depends not only on warnings and technical data but also on the institutional capacity and resources needed to convert information into protective action.

Tsunami preparedness cannot be achieved through warning systems or individual action in isolation. It requires sustained regional cooperation, effective national arrangements and communities equipped with the knowledge and resources to respond. For the Greater Caribbean, strengthening these connections is essential to protecting coastal populations, livelihoods and infrastructure. This World Tsunami Awareness Day, the message is clear: know the warning signs, understand the risks, prepare a plan and help others do the same. The ACS remains committed to working with its Member States, Associate Members and partners to strengthen preparedness across the Greater Caribbean. Resilience starts with you, but it is strengthened through collective responsibility.

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