

# Indonesia Volcano Calmer After Sudden Eruptions

**Brian Padden, Voice of America, 8-31-10**

The Indonesian volcano Mount Sinabung in North Sumatra appears to be calming down. Approximately 29,000 people have been evacuated from around the mountain but there are reports that some villagers have already returned to their homes.

Mount Sinabung's eruptions on Sunday and Monday were the first in 400 years and have driven thousands of people from their homes near its slopes.

Surono, the head of the Indonesian Volcanology and Geological Disaster Mitigation Agency, says the evacuation was a precautionary measure to prevent widespread panic and the situation is not life threatening, although the ash and smoke can cause illnesses.

"Regarding the danger of the Sinabung volcano, eruption of just volcanic ash and not lava flow, not much glowing material, it is not very dangerous for the life," he said.

Surono says he plans to lift the evacuation order in a week or two if the situation does not change. But there were reports on Tuesday some villagers have already returned to their homes.

Thousands of people have been treated for smoke inhalation and other health problems related to the volcano. The Indonesian Red Cross and the Health Ministry sent doctors and medicines to the region. The National Disaster Management Agency is providing thousands of face masks and food to assist the evacuees.

The 2,400-meter-high volcano last erupted in the year 1600, and officials say they had not been monitoring the mountain because it had been inactive for so long.

Surono rejects public speculation that the eruption could signal that a major earthquake will soon follow.

"So normally after earthquake, followed by volcanic activity, not volcanic activity followed by earthquake," he said.

Officials are calling the eruption a rare event that defies predictions about how long Mount Sinabung will remain active.

Indonesia sits along what is known as the Pacific Ring of Fire - one of the most geologically active regions in the world. The country frequently experiences earthquakes - two last year caused hundreds of deaths. It also has the most active volcanoes in the world, with more than 70.