

# Nine dead, villages destroyed in Solomons tsunami

**Kristen Gelineau, Associated Press, 2-7-13**

SYDNEY—Aid workers struggled to reach remote, tsunami-ravaged villages in the Solomon Islands on Thursday and the death toll rose to at least nine as more bodies were found in wrecked homes and debris in the South Pacific country.

The victims, including a child, were killed when a powerful earthquake set off a small tsunami that sent 1.5-meter (5-foot) waves roaring inland on Santa Cruz Island, in the eastern Solomons, on Wednesday. Around 100 homes across five villages were damaged or destroyed.

The waves proved deadly for five elderly villagers and a child, who weren't fast enough to outrun the rushing water, said George Herming, a spokesman for the prime minister. Three more bodies were found Thursday, but Herming said details of how those victims died were not immediately available.

Several others are missing and dozens of strong aftershocks were keeping frightened villagers from returning to the coast, Herming said.

"People are still scared of going back to their homes because there's nothing left, so they are residing in temporary shelters on higher ground," Herming said.

The tsunami was generated by an 8.0-magnitude earthquake that struck near the town of Lata, on Santa Cruz in Temotu, the easternmost province in the Solomons.

Disaster officials were en route to the isolated area Thursday after the local airport, which was flooded by the tsunami, was finally cleared of debris.

The Solomons comprise more than 200 islands with a population of about 552,000 people. They lie on the "Ring of Fire"—an arc of earthquake and volcanic zones that stretches around the Pacific Rim and where about 90 percent of the world's quakes occur.

More than 50 people were killed and thousands lost their homes in April 2007 when a magnitude-8.1 quake hit the western Solomon Islands, sending waves crashing into coastal villages.