

ICG/CARIBE EWS-XIX 4.4

UNESCO

INTERGOVERNMENTAL OCEANOGRAPHIC COMMISSION

Nineteenth Session of the Intergovernmental Coordination Group for the Tsunami and Other Coastal Hazards Warning System for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions

(ICG/CARIBE EWS-XIX)

Curaçao

April 22–24, 2026

AGENDA ITEM 4.4

Working Group 4: Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, and Community Communication Systems

This document outlines the activities, recommendations, conclusions, and proposed work plan of Working Group 4: Mitigation, Preparedness, Response, and Community Communication Systems. The ICG is asked to review, comment on, and endorse the recommendations from Working Group 4.

1. INTRODUCTION – TERMS OF REFERENCE

Purpose:

To assess and strengthen regional capacities and advise the ICG on mitigation systems, preparedness planning, response readiness, evacuation systems, community communication systems, public awareness, and inclusive protective action measures for tsunamis and other coastal hazards.

Tasks:

- Support Member States in evacuation planning, route identification, signage, and safe-zone systems.
- Encourage integration of tsunami preparedness into schools, tourism facilities, faith-based institutions, and local governance systems.
- Evaluate tsunami exercises and real-event lessons in order to improve readiness and response effectiveness.
- Identify gaps affecting vulnerable populations, including persons with disabilities, elderly persons, visitors, and remote communities.
- Promote implementation, renewal, and sustainability of the UNESCO/IOC Tsunami Ready Recognition Program.

- Encourage practical communication systems linking national authorities with communities.
- Promote sharing of experience, expertise, and peer learning among Member States.
- Support alignment with the Ocean Decade Tsunami Program and Early Warnings for All initiative.
- Examine methods for transforming technical warning data into clear public protective-action messaging.

Working Group 4 operates under the governance framework of IOC Decision A-33/3.4.1 on Warning and Mitigation Systems for Ocean Hazards, as implemented through ICG/CARIBE-EWS.

Working Group 4 is chaired by **Mr. Jacob Ngumbah (Saint Kitts and Nevis)**, with **Ms. Kawana Jones (Grenada)** and **Ms. Lidia Torres Bernhard (Honduras)** as vice-chairs. **The group has 24 members. During the reporting period, it held two virtual meetings and one regional virtual event.** Additional business was conducted via email and technical coordination.

2. WORKING GROUP 4 ACTIVITIES 2025–2026

2.1 Status on Implementation of Tasks and Recommendations from ICG CARIBE EWS XVIII

Governance and Coordination

- Convened the inaugural General Meeting of Working Group 4 for the reporting cycle.
- Reaffirmed the mandate of WG4 in mitigation, preparedness, response readiness and community communication systems.
- Reviewed regional priorities and agreed a pathway toward ICG XIX deliverables.
- Strengthened member engagement and technical participation.

Strengthening Community Preparedness and Tsunami Ready Processes

- Supported discussions on Tsunami Ready implementation and renewal processes.
- Reviewed sustainability principles, including signage maintenance, evacuation readiness, outreach continuity, and institutional ownership.
- Encouraged Member States to view Tsunami Ready as an ongoing readiness program, not a one-time certification.

Anguilla Tsunami Ready Renewal

- Participated in the formal review process for the renewal of Anguilla’s Tsunami Ready Recognition.
- Recognized Anguilla as the first Tsunami Ready territory in the Caribbean (2011).

- Reviewed evidence under the pillars of Assessment, Preparedness and Response.
- Noted updated hazard mapping, improved inundation modelling and exposure analysis.
- Reviewed continued signage maintenance, school outreach, tourism engagement and CARIBE WAVE participation.
- Noted updated SOPs, operational readiness systems and communication redundancy measures.
- Recognized Anguilla’s renewal progress as a positive regional example of sustainability.

Strengthening Evacuation Signage and Safe Zone Guidance

- Member States advanced route signage, assembly areas, directional markers, and coastal awareness displays.
- Reviewed the CARIBE-EWS Regional Tsunami Signage Inventory.
- Encouraged annual updates to the inventory, including location metadata, maintenance status, and photographic documentation.
- Ongoing maintenance, multilingual adaptation, and regular visibility checks are required.

Exercises and Operational Readiness

- CARIBE WAVE 26 provided opportunities to assess evacuation timing, movement, accountability systems, and coordination.
- Schools, emergency agencies, and communities in several territories participated actively.
- Challenges included congestion, reliance on vehicles, delayed movement, and limited private-sector participation.
- Encouraged structured After-Action Reviews and corrective action planning.

Natural Warning Signs Awareness

- Reaffirmed the importance of immediate self-evacuation following strong shaking, unusual sea withdrawal, sudden sea surge, or abnormal ocean sounds.

Inclusive Preparedness Measures

- Welcomed accessible preparedness materials such as Braille resources and adapted educational formats.
- Encouraged sign language, visual, multilingual, and simplified messaging products.
- Supported the inclusion of persons with disabilities in exercises and drills.

2.2 Other Activities

Community Communication Systems Development

WG4 explored practical Island Community Communication Networks using trusted local focal points connected to national disaster authorities.

Potential stakeholders include:

- Schools
- Faith-based organizations
- Tourism operators
- Fishers
- Youth groups
- Health facilities
- Village leaders
- Disability focal points
- Community volunteers
- Media entities
- **Community Disaster Ambassadors / Community Communications Ambassadors**

WG4 recognized that trusted community representatives enhance last-mile warning delivery, preparedness outreach, behavioral change campaigns, and local mobilization before, during, and after hazard events.

Communication Simplification for Public Action

WG4 discussed the need to translate technical data, warning bulletins, and scientific information into clear public messages that communities can quickly understand and act on.

This includes transforming risk information into practical guidance using plain language, culturally relevant messaging, and action-oriented communication formats.

Creative Public Awareness Messaging

WG4 highlighted the value of creative communication tools in increasing public attention, message retention, and behavioral responses, particularly among youth and broader communities.

Examples include:

- **Preparedness jingles and theme songs**
- Radio public service announcements
- Youth talk shows and interviews
- Storytelling and drama presentations
- Social media reels and short videos

- School competitions and quizzes
- Posters, murals, and visual campaigns
- Disaster awareness concerts and awareness events
- Faith-based messaging formats
- Local language and culturally adapted campaigns

WG4 noted that creative approaches can make preparedness messages more memorable and actionable.

Capacity Building Priorities

- Evacuation leadership
- Rumor management
- Warning relay protocols
- Tourism preparedness
- Disability-inclusive planning
- Youth ambassador programs
- Community Disaster Ambassador programs
- Backup telecommunications systems
- Crisis communication skills
- Public information under pressure

Cross-Sector Preparedness Integration

Integration of tsunami preparedness into broader multi-hazard systems, especially in Small Island Developing States, was encouraged.

3. KEY CHALLENGES / OPPORTUNITIES

Challenges

- Tsunamis are low-frequency but high-impact hazards, creating complacency risks.
- Competing hazards strain limited resources.
- Some communities remain unfamiliar with safe zones.
- Staff turnover weakens institutional memory.
- Accessibility gaps remain.
- Visitors may be unfamiliar with routes and hazards.
- Technical warning information may not always translate into immediate protective action.

Opportunities

- CARIBE WAVE exercises generate participation and visibility.
- Tsunami Ready offers measurable preparedness benchmarks.
- The Ocean Decade Tsunami Programme supports people-centered resilience.
- Early Warnings for All supports communication strengthening.
- Strong island community networks can improve trust and outreach.
- Youth, schools and faith institutions can expand behavioural change campaigns.
- Digital tools can support rapid communication and public awareness.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ICG/CARIBE EWS XIX

1. Recognizes the actions of Working Group 4 towards the advancement of mitigation, preparedness, response readiness, and community communication systems.
2. Welcomes the participation of Member State nominees, technical partners, and observers in Working Group 4 and encourages active participation of all members.
3. Commends the progress of Anguilla's Tsunami Ready Renewal as a major regional milestone and encourages Member States to pursue recognition and renewal pathways.
4. Recommends that Member States continue strengthening tsunami evacuation signage, route visibility, and safe-zone identification systems.
5. Further recommends annual updates to the Regional Tsunami Signage Inventory and continued sharing of good practices.
6. Encourages regular CARIBE WAVE and national exercises to evaluate warning dissemination, protective movement, accountability systems, and support for vulnerable groups.
7. Recommends continued integration of tsunami preparedness into schools, tourism facilities, faith-based institutions, and community organizations.
8. Further recommends developing Community Communication Networks linked to national disaster authorities to strengthen last-mile readiness.
9. **Further recommends that Member States explore and institutionalize the use of official non-traditional communication platforms, including WhatsApp group networks, email distribution systems, verified social media channels, and other digital communication tools, as complementary systems to strengthen rapid warning dissemination, preparedness outreach, stakeholder coordination, and emergency communication redundancy.**
10. Encourages accessible preparedness products, including Braille, captioned video, sign language, multilingual, and simplified resources.

11. Notes the accessible materials developed by ITIC-CAR for blind and visually impaired persons.
12. Recommends that Working Group 4 identify and engage organizations serving blind and visually impaired communities to mainstream these materials across Member States.
13. Further recommends promotion of these materials in Braille, audio, tactile, large print, and digital accessible formats.
14. Encourages inclusion of blind and visually impaired persons and other vulnerable groups in CARIBE WAVE exercises, evacuation drills, and preparedness activities.
15. Notes the importance of maintaining Tsunami Ready recognition through continuous improvement rather than one-time certification.
16. Further notes that Small Island Developing States require context-specific evacuation planning due to terrain, tourism concentration, and infrastructure limitations.
17. Notes that warning systems are most effective when scientific information is converted into understandable public action.
18. **Recommends Working Group 4 and Member States strengthen systems that transform tsunami data, bulletins, and technical complexity into simple, clear, people-centered messages that move communities from complexity to simplicity and from awareness to action.**
19. Requests Working Group 4 to continue documenting good practices and lessons learned from CARIBE WAVE exercises and Member State experiences for presentation to ICG XX.
20. Appreciates the support of the Secretariat, ITIC-CAR, Tsunami Ready partners, Member States and regional stakeholders supporting preparedness advancement.

5. Membership as of April 21, 2026

1. Jacob Ngumbah, Saint Kitts and Nevis (Chair)
2. Kawana Jones, Grenada (Vice Chair)
3. Lidia Torres Bernhard, Honduras (Vice Chair)
4. Alison Brome
5. Mary Luz Renfigo
6. Ronald Sanchez Escobar
7. Fabio Rivera-Cerdas
8. Kristel Espinoza Hernández
9. Silvia Chacón-Barrantes
10. Armelle Alamelle
11. Daniel Polinacci

12. Eloise Mercuel
13. Julien Marie
14. Marie-Noelle Raveau
15. Matthieu Péroche
16. Patrick Tyburn
17. José Antonio Tojil Jiménez
18. Kaza Hippolyte
19. Mabiuis Francis
20. Maria Medard
21. Stacey Edwards
22. Christa G. Von Hillebrandt-Andrade
23. Roy Ruiz
24. Regina Browne

6. Proposed Work Plan 2026–2027

- Expand community communication systems model guidance.
- Promote accessible preparedness materials region-wide.
- Support Tsunami Ready sustainability and renewal processes.
- Develop practical evacuation behavior metrics for CARIBE WAVE 27.
- Increase tourism-sector preparedness engagement.
- Strengthen youth and Community Disaster Communications Ambassadors and school preparedness frameworks.
- Promote creative messaging approaches for tsunami awareness, including storytelling, youth media, cultural formats, radio, digital campaigns, visual arts, and behavior-change communication tools.
- Share model signage and safe-zone practices across the region.
- Advance disability-inclusive preparedness partnerships and accessible education systems.
- Promote training in communication simplification, behavioral messaging, **communications governance**, crisis communication leadership, rumor management, data interpretation, and public action response systems.