

Escalating Crisis in Papua New Guinea

The recent landslide on 24 May 2024 in Enga Province, Papua New Guinea, has severely impacted the remote highlands area of Yambali village, where an estimated 2,000 individuals are feared buried (as of this report). The disaster has heightened concerns about further landslides and the risk of disease outbreaks due to decaying bodies and contaminated water sources.

Serhan Aktoprak, head of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in Papua New Guinea, emphasized the health risks of decomposing corpses and polluted water. The area is also vulnerable to debris movement affecting downstream communities. The United Nations and other international organizations are assisting, providing shelter to 1,600 people, and coordinating with the Papua New Guinea government to enhance relief efforts.

Local responses have been supported by donated earth-moving machinery, aiding in rescue operations. Despite these efforts, challenges persist due to difficult terrain and the ongoing threat of additional landslides and potential disease outbreaks. This situation underscores the need for international collaboration and effective disaster response, especially in geographically and socially vulnerable regions.

The government of Papua New Guinea has rallied support from global allies, including India, Australia, China, and the US, who have pledged millions towards relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction efforts.

Additionally, tribal violence and looting have necessitated heightened security for aid convoys travelling to the disaster site. Recent clashes on 25 May resulted in 8 deaths and further complicated relief efforts.

Emergency response is expected to last several weeks, with anticipated traffic congestion on local roads and nearby airports. Security measures will continue to safeguard aid convoys and personnel from tribal violence.